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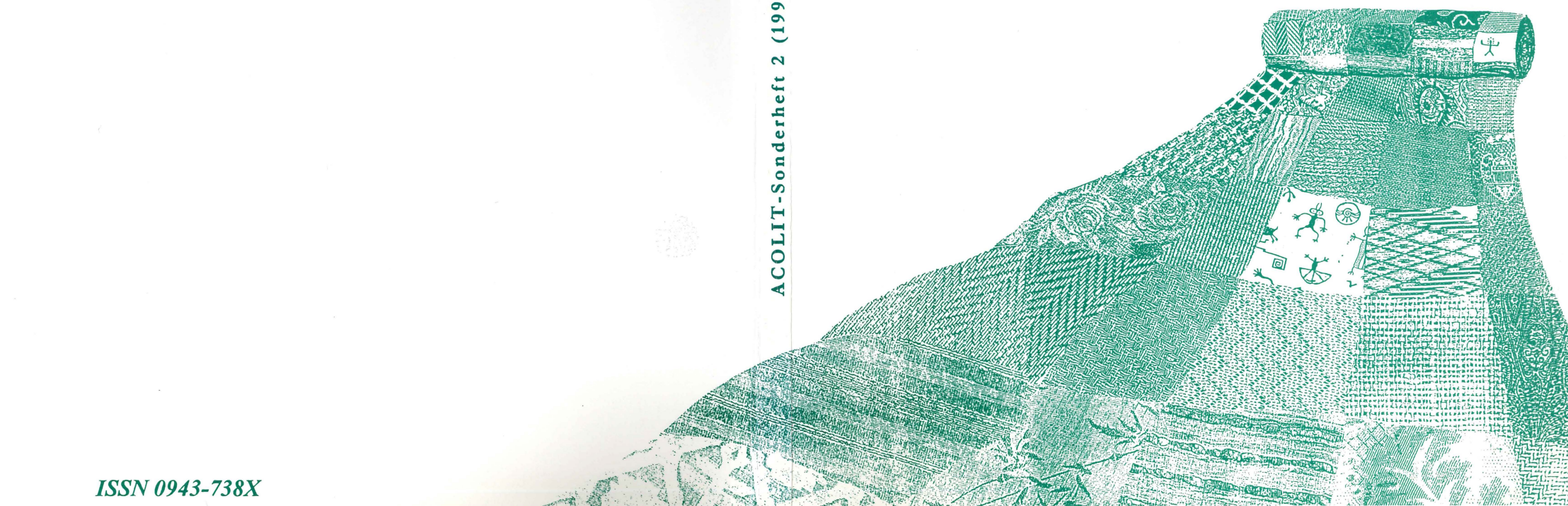
The Role of the Critic in Postcolonial Studies



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Can 'The Subaltern' Be Read ?

— The Role of the Critic in Postcolonial Studies

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Contents

Introduction

TOBIAS DÖRING, UWE SCHÄFER, AND MARK STEIN

This volume collects a series of papers first presented and discussed during a Graduate Workshop on Postcolonial Studies held at the Institute for English and American Studies, J.W.Goethe-University Frankfurt a.M. in April 1996. The first of its kind in a German academic context, the two-day workshop was designed to combine the public presentation of insights or arguments, as in a conference format, with the more intimate annd intensive debates of a seminar group, and thus to provide a forum for graduate students in which to share and question aspects of their work. The same agenda may be claimed for this publication. The collecting and editing of all papers presented on this particular occasion aims at widening their prospective audience while at the same time continuing the debate and asking for responses. With the variety of viewpoints taken and the range of approaches practised in the following ten contributions, the mode of questioning prevails. As editors we have therefore seen our prime task in documenting this multiplicity of interests and material, so that readers may critically engage their own interests and bring to bear their judgments.

Critical variety notwithstanding, the individual contributions are indeed linked together by their central focus on a shared concern which also gave the theoretical incitement to the workshop: the role of the critic in postcolonial studies. As our call for statements pointed out, this role is often felt to be a problematic one for reasons that no-one in the field can easily afford to disregard. The following should serve to introduce this problematics and then to briefly highlight how each contribution addresses the seminal question raised by our title – a question which would seem to implicate every individual reader. Most students of African, Asian, Caribbean, Pacific, North American or Black British literatures in English are faced with the problem of how to approach texts that operate in the reference systems of other cultures, that employ varieties of the English language and construct meanings radically different from the expectations of European readerships. Reading may be understood as a negotiation process ascribing sense and constructing meaning in a frame of discursive forces which circumscribe the reader's position and shape the texts available for our reading. What does this imply for us when dealing with texts from culturally distant areas? How can these texts be read and critically evaluated without either falling for an exotic otherness nor subjecting them, in neo-Orientalist fashion, to expert Western theories?

What is at stake here is the role of the critic which, in view of colonial legacies as well as recent developments, merits close investigation. For instance, the theoretical positions of Bhabha, Said and Spivak have come to serve as fundamental reference points for post-colonial studies to such an extent that they have sometimes been critically referred to as the holy trinity. All safely located at the summit of the

American academy, they still claim to speak as "postcolonial subjects;" Spivak, for one, insists "that we are natives too."[1] Although at least Said and Spivak try to counteract their contradictory position by showing political engagement, this scenario still begs a number of questions about who is in the position to speak and which delimiting forces intersect in such positions. Is critical discourse on post-colonial writing authorised by institutional position and biography? Are we witnessing a new (strategic?) essentialism of who can speak about post-colonial writing and along which lines? Given our location in central Europe, what is our investment and our interest in (literary) histories that are not straightforwardly "ours"? What are the implications of claiming some sort of muteness of the "subaltern" and proceeding to speak for him/her? And who can claim the label "subaltern" or be so labelled with justification? These points are not only raised in an ethical sense but call for practical consideration and involve a theoretical challenge: What reading strategies, what vocabularies, what translation processes are conceivable, accessible and necessary for our work? And which precautions seem advisable to safeguard against Eurocentric generalisations?

In which ways do we respond and how do we respond responsibly? Where are our ethical and practical guidelines for reading derived from? Do we instil textual agency? Do we "restore" textual agency? Do we merely detect textual agency? In which way is the position of the critic implicated in this scenario? How do the new media and new technologies produce unaccustomed sites and new conditions not only for the production but also for the reception of literature?

The category "subaltern" has a varied history from military jargon via Gramsci and Spivak into postcolonial discourse. Can the "subaltern" be defined by the lack of a speaking position or by the lack of soliciting a response? Do we need a relational understanding of the subaltern, i.e. is subalternity a position which emerges in and from a specific discursive situation? And is this discursive situation often characterised by some creolized use of language, a language of the subaltern? What do we as critics do with such a discursive situation? How do we learn of it, how do we approach an understanding of it? Ought critics aim for proximity or acknowledge difference?

The issues of localisation, specification, of spatial, cultural and epistemological differentiations need to be addressed and here one example for such vigilance comes from an influential practitioner. In her seminal critique of Deleuze, Guattari and Foucault entitled "Can the Subaltern Speak," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak uses the following to illustrate the problematics of reading subaltern intervention:

> A young woman of sixteen or seventeen, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, hanged herself in her father's modest apartment in North Calcutta in 1926. The suicide was a puzzle since, as Bhuvaneswari was menstruating at the time, it was clearly not a case of illicit pregnancy. Nearly a decade later, it was discovered that she was a member of one of the many involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence. She had finally been entrusted with a political assassination. Unable to confront the task and yet aware of the practical need for trust, she killed herself.[2]

1 "Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's Foe Reading Defoe's Crusoe/Roxana." *Consequences of Theory*. Ed. J. Arac and B. Johnson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1991. 172.

Spivak concludes her essay claiming that the "subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item" (104). This is not the same as claiming inarticulacy for the "subaltern;" rather, it is claimed that "[w]hile waiting, Bhuvaneswari [...] perhaps rewrote the social text of sati-suicide in an interventionist way." Her carefully timed suicide is scripted to prevent being read as the consequence of an illegitimate passion. It was, however, misread by her family and appropriated by the male leaders of the struggle in which Bhuvaneswari was involved:

> The emergent dissenting possibilities of that hegemonic account [...] are well documented and popularly well remembered through the discourse of the male leaders and participants in the independence movement. The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read. (Spivak, 104)

The récit of Bhuvaneswari's intervention is then subsumed in a larger "male" narrative which erases its specificities. While it cannot be heard or read according to Spivak, while Bhuvaneswari does not perform a speech act in that she is not heard or read, she nevertheless has acted and "spoken." Yet a record of this is hard to come by: "The denial of history is the 'subaltern' condition" as Mario A. Caro argued during the workshop.

Spivak's argument appears contradictory: while claiming that the "subaltern cannot speak" – which in fact is her definition of subalternity – she recaptures the agency of Bhuvaneswari's intervention. In that sense Bhuvaneswari is clearly what Spivak calls "tragic failures as *model*[*s*] of interventionist practice" while being concurrently more than a mute or muted victim. In becoming an object "of discourse analysis for the non-self-abdicating intellectual," Bhuvaneswari's narrative in Spivak's proposed reconstruction *can* be read. Spivak thus performs a contradiction to her own argument, presumably in order to incite reading in what she would call a responsive and responsible way.

The metaphor "subaltern" as it signifies in this collection's title is hence indebted foremost to Spivak's use of the term. As was shown above, the male leaders and participants in the independence movement are not defined as subaltern but it is the female, the other's other, who apparently cannot be heard or read. Hence the subaltern's voice is not used synonymously to postcolonial writing in the formulation we chose. It is rather Spivak's complex venture in (re)constructing such a voice by rereading Bhuvaneswari's narrative and directing her own attention to its specificities that has served as a guideline for our thoughts.

We have outlined above that the main goals of the workshop were to collect and to theorize the various problems and contradictions that occur with regard to the role

2 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. C. Nelson, L. Grossberg. Chicago: U. of Illinois P 1988. 271-313. Rpt. in P. Williams, L. Chrisman, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester 1993. 66-111. 103.

of the critic as a mediator or translator in the complex spaces between marginalized literatures and cultural centres and, if possible, make some practical suggestions for strategies towards responsible criticism in postcolonial studies.

As a result, the volume falls roughly into two parts. In the first one, the authors mainly problematize the notions of "the critic" and "the subaltern." They point out the contradictions involved in the role-model of the critic and the diverse meanings that may be ascribed to the notion "subaltern" in various contexts. The second part is devoted to some practical consequences from the workshop discussions.

The volume opens with a contribution by **Mario A. Caro**, who set the tune for the workshop by pointing out the transformation process that testimonios, often claimed to represent the "authentic" voice of the subaltern, may undergo on their long way from periphery to centre. Drawing on Spivak's use of Derrida's *concept-metaphor* and chosing the example of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y asi me nació la consciencia*, which is compared to the story of Mahasweta Devi's *Imaginary Maps*, he demonstrates the complex transformation and translation processes involved in the *representation of subaltern voices* and the contradictions in the role of the critic. While Rigoberta Menchú's text undergoes several re-writings by compilers and translators until its arrival in the academy, Devi's text may be regarded as a "joint intellectual production by two intellectuals working together in responding to issues affecting the subaltern in India." Caro warns that "the trade in testimonios is an uneven exchange; the indigenous people who are the subjects of these histories are seldom their consumers." He concludes that a responsible criticism "necessitates listening to, in order to speak with, the subaltern" thereby reducing the danger of a "postcolonial practice that is complicit with hegemonic capitalist discourse."

The role of the critic is de-emphasized in the contribution by **Markus Heide**. Unlike Caro, he insists on the primacy of the text as a mediator between "us" and "the subaltern." He proposes to focus on "the subaltern's production of theory and look at the reciprocal exchange between theoretical discussions and literary texts" and points out how the terms "identity" and "authenticity" are discussed and re-evaluated in the context of Chicano/a literature, especially in relation to the models of *hybridity* that have been created in order to theorize the complex situation in the Mexican-American borderlands and to oppose cultural stasis.

In his contribution, **Marc Colavincenzo** ponders on the notion of "the subaltern" and cautions against the danger of an arbitrary usage of this term by "us" as critics for purposes of classification, especially against the danger of exoticizing, or, even worse, subtly enforcing the "other." He warns that "the subaltern" may become a "cipher, [...] an empty space which can be filled in different ways."

Mark Stein rounds up the first part of the volume by carrying Caro's warning of "postcolonial practices complicit with hegemonic capitalist discourse" further. He concentrates on the problem of substituting political engagement by a "theory of engagement" in the academy. Taking Homi Bhabha as an example, Stein argues that certain types of discourse effectively read out political engagement by essentializing subaltern voices as well as the inherent contradictions of colonial discourse: "The

umpire of empire appears disdainful of discrete geographies, time spans and specific cultural frameworks."

The second part begins with a contribution by **Uwe Schäfer**, who tries to demonstrate the creative impulses and turns that postcolonial texts have given to nihilist tendencies and cynical rationalism in Western societies by analyzing the complex rewritings of the philosophical implications of Samuel Beckett's late prose text *Imagination Dead Imagine* in the text *Jonestown* by the Anglo-Caribbean writer Wilson Harris. Drawing on Amerindian traditions and the "universal unconscious," Schäfer points out how *Jonestown* is able to overcome the violent exclusion of imaginary others particular to rationalist thought so meticulously depicted in Beckett's text. He concludes that *Jonestown* demonstrates how nihilism may be turned into "a source of creativity in a time that seems to have abandoned hope."

In her contribution, **Susanne Mühleisen** maps out the boundaries in postcolonial communication by focussing on the problem of oral vs. written discourse. The primacy of writing is reinforced by an even stricter standardization in academic discourse. Standard English is assigned the "almost exclusive voice of authority" by academics. The permanent negotiation of relevant terms in standard English "ahead of the discourse," which actually has the features of an "anti-language," may better be understood as a strategy to control discourse and to strengthen group identity. These strategies are called into question by the creative promotion of less standardized forms of English, or *englishes*.

Anne Zimmermann draws some practical consequences from the discussions in the workshop and argues that in order to avoid elitism by extensive theorizing and essentialism by making "nativeness" the exclusive criterion for authority – both strategies that play into imperialist discourse – it is essential to directly interact with people. On the basis of a socio-psychological understanding of identity, Zimmermann develops a model of identity and culture that allows for a more complex (self-)location of the critic than the common simple dichotomy of subject and object and concludes that it is necessary "to make the position of the speaking subject visible." Furthermore, she suggests to differentiate between audiences and to allow for a truly cross-cultural exchange: critics and theorists "dealing with post-colonial literatures should be prepared to interact with the 'subalterns' without desiring to impose his or her view on them."

The two subsequent contributions outline two complementary strategies for responsible criticism in postcolonial studies that speak from a location "inside" and/or "outside" the teaching machine. **Sandra Carolan-Brozy** argues for developing "through dialogue an informed position of culturally, politically and socially responsible awareness without glossing over differences" in order to create forms of alignment with the demands formulated by Native writers and critics. As a consequence, she gives an extensive account of the views and reservations of Native Canadian critics with regard to the treatment of Native texts in the academy.

Tobias Döring points out the gaps and limitations of critical discourse. The traditional role of the critic as tour guide and explorer, which reproduces colonial patterns of discourse, should no longer be maintained in postcolonial studies. With the

example of a passage from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Döring shows how "obscure" elements of canonical texts may "fail to serve the explanatory and exploratory techniques of informed criticism" and hence uphold difference through textual agency. To remain sensitive to "the obscure" in texts may help to avoid the ever-present danger of semantic pacification and allow for a continual and creative *mis*reading of "the subaltern."

The volume closes with an epilogue by **Renate Eigenbrod**, who reflects on the the location and the course of the workshop and draws the conclusion that "the reasoning of Western civilization has its limitations and that the critic in postcolonial studies should understand him- or herself more as a receiver than as a provider of knowledge," while still going on saying "And yet" ...

From Subaltern to Organic Intellectual: Re-(e)valuating Rigoberta Menchú's Testimonio

MARIO A. CARO

> When the subaltern "speaks" in order to be heard and gets into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance, he or she is or is on the way to becoming an organic intellectual. Spivak (Preface, *Imaginary Maps* xxvi)

In 1992, the year marking the quincentenary of Columbus's arrival in the Western hemisphere, a Maya-Quiché Indian was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Her name is Rigoberta Menchú. The gesture has opened various forums for the discussion of her work. Much of this discussion, at least in academia, is centered on her testimonial autobiography, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y asi me nacío consciencia*, which is often invoked as an instance of the authentic voice of the subaltern.[1]

I would like to investigate what happens when the subaltern, whose voice by definition is inaudible, is heard. When this mute subject speaks, does the entrance of this speech into the public sphere transform the speaker into an organic intellectual or does it merely hypostatize the subaltern? What is the role, if any, of the "traditional" intellectual in this transformation? I will begin my exploration of the ramifications of these questions for the investigation of Menchú's work by considering Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's attempts to re-define the "subaltern." I will then analyze Spivak's endeavor to foster the emergence of an organic intellectual in India, undertaken as part of her role as a "traditional" intellectual, in order to discuss its relevance to a Latin American context.[2]

The seminal critique on the subjectivity of the subaltern is Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?"[3] The essay explores the histories of epistemic violence that have prevented the subaltern – a subject that in Spivak's example is multiply silenced as woman, as inhabitant of the "third-world," and a member of the peasant class – from speaking. Her essay begins with an analysis of the effect of critiques advanced by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, whom Spivak refers to as "those intellectuals who are our best prophets of heterogeneity and the Other," that result in the "reintroduc[tion of] the undivided subject into the discourse of power" (CSS 272,

I would like to thank Professors Eva Geulen and Janet Wolff as well as the members of the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis Reading Group for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

1 Of particular relevance to the discussion of subalternity and testimonios are the collections of essays edited by Beverley and Achugar as well as those by Jara and Vidal.

2 The terms "organic" and "traditional" intellectual are defined below.

3 Hereafter cited as "CSS." This essay, delivered at a conference on Marxism in 1983, sets forth much of the groundwork for Spivak's work on postcoloniality, a project which combines feminist theory, Marxism, and deconstruction to analyze the dynamics of colonialism. According to Landry and MacLean, a revised version of this essay is forthcoming (8).

274).[4] Spivak argues that by claiming that "the masses *know* perfectly well, clearly [...] they know far better than [the intellectual] and they certainly say it very well," by depicting the subaltern as a homogenous, universal, self-representing subject, Foucault and Deleuze, as intellectuals, remain transparent (CSS 274f). Spivak goes on to discuss two meanings of *representation*: a depiction or interpretation, *darstellen* (the portrayal of the subaltern as "politically canny"), and as a substitution or stand-in, *vertreten*, (Foucault and Deleuze speaking on behalf of the subaltern). Their representation of the subaltern ignores the specificity of conditions created by the international division of labour and one of its necessary hegemonic devices – epistemic violence (CSS 289).

The role of representation in the international division of labor is an essential concern in Spivak's efforts to analyze the hegemonic discourse established by imperialism:

> Outside (though not completely so) the circuit of the *international* division of labor, there are people whose consciousness we cannot grasp if we close off our benevolence by constructing a homogenous Other referring only to our place in the seat of the Same as the Self. Here are subsistence farmers, unorganized peasant labor, the tribals, and the communities of zero workers on the street or in the countryside. (CSS 288)

Spivak develops her argument by looking at some of the epistemic constructs that have come to delineate "Indian" culture in general and specifically the place of women within it. She focuses on the construction of the history of the practice of *sati*, the rite of widow self-sacrifice, and the ways its discourse silences the voices of the widows themselves. By rigorously analyzing how patriarchal practices of history writing, both British and Indian, have placed the subaltern outside hegemonic discourse, Spivak argues that these practices gender the subaltern female.

I have drastically reduced what is an extremely complicated argument in order to provide a background for an analysis of Spivak's latest project, a translation of a selection of short stories by Mahasweta Devi entitled *Imaginary Maps*. Devi is a West Bengali woman, who – as a fiction writer, journalist, and activist – attempts to address the plight of the postcolonial subject who is without access to means of self-representation. Spivak describes the space created by Devi's fiction as

> rather special [...] it is the space of the "subaltern," [...] the habitat of the proletariat [...] Mahasweta's fiction suggests that *this* is the space of the displacement of the colonization-decolonization reversal. This is the space that can become, for her, a dystopic representation of decolonization *as such.* (Spivak, "Power/Knowledge" 48-49)

Spivak has not only translated the volume of Devi's work, she also provides a preface and an afterword that place the stories within a theoretical framework. Spivak acknowledges that by providing this framework her contribution can be perceived as an instance of speaking for the subaltern. However, she is also aware of the greater risk of not providing it:

4 Spivak specifically refers to "Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation Between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze." *Michel Foucault*. Ed. Donald F. Brouchard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1977. 205-217.

> If these comments are seen as "too theoretical," I will remind the readers of this translation, with respect, that the migrant in the North, a species of "wild anthropologist," at least knows the points of rejection or contempt hidden behind the mask of untheorized solidarity, without liabilities. (Spivak, Preface to *Imaginary Maps* xxvi)

The risk taken by Spivak's act of supplementation strategically allows for the entry of Devi's work into a theoretical discourse that would otherwise be foreclosed. At first glance the result of taking such a risk may seem similar to that produced by Foucault and Deleuze's discourse – the positing of an undivided subjectivity. But Spivak elaborates that "the organic intellectual is not a concept of identity but rather of a focus on that part of the subject which focuses on the intellectual's *function*" (Spivak, "Preface" 209, n. 13, emphasis added). Although concentrating on the performative aspect of the production of intellectual work dislocates the position of the intellectual as an undivided subject, Spivak is here referring to a specific type of intellectual – the organic intellectual. Is there a difference in the type of intellectual work *performed* by an organic intellectual as opposed to that of a "traditional" intellectual? What would be the strategies required by the hierarchy implied by such a differentiation?

Gramsci and the Function of the Intellectual

The terms "traditional" and "organic" as modifiers that differentiate between two types of intellectuals were introduced by Antonio Gramsci. He makes a distinction between the category of intellectuals "*already in existence*" who seemed indeed to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms, that is the traditional intellectuals such as "scholars and scientists, theorists, non-ecclesiastical philosopher, etc.," and the category of intellectuals that "every social group, *coming into existence* creates together with itself, organically, [...] [giving] it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields" (Gramsci 5-7, emphasis added). Therefore, the function of the organic intellectual is defined by a new or emerging social class while that of the traditional intellectual is part of the pre-existing, hegemonic classes.

Gramsci goes on to make a further distinction between urban and rural-type intellectuals: the former develop from and for industry and "have no autonomous initiative [...] their job is to articulate the relationship between the entrepreneur and the instrumental mass," while the latter tend to be traditional intellectuals who bring "into contact the peasant masses with the local and state administration (lawyers, notaries, etc.)" (Gramsci 14). The difference appears to be that the "urban organic" intellectual is a liaison from top management down to workers, a sort of middle-management function, while the "rural traditional" intellectual operates from the bottom up, more of a proxy function.

Although both types of intellectuals function as intermediaries, Gramsci notes that:

> The function of organising social hegemony and state domination [i.e. the work of the intellectual] certainly gives rise to a particular and therefore to a whole *hierarchy* of qualifications in some of which there is no apparent

> attribution of directive or organisational functions. (Gramsci 13, emphases added)

A hierarchy is therefore implied, which seems to be determined by the type of work an intellectual produces. What are the ramifications of such a hierarchy, of valuing "traditional" over "organic" intellectual work, particularly when the terms for such a valuation are set by the former?

Returning to Spivak's work, her gesture of ushering Devi's fiction into a forum which allows for a wider audience (*Imaginary Maps* was simultaneously published in India and the United States) is, according to Gramsci's formulation, a function of the traditional intellectual. How, then, could Devi's intellectual work be categorized? Is her work the product of an organic intellectual as defined by Gramsci? He did not believe that the peasants could develop their own organic intellectuals (Gramsci 6). In his view, since the peasantry lives in an economic situation that is devoid of class representation, becoming an intellectual would automatically advance that individual into another class (Gramsci 14).

However, it must be kept in mind that Gramsci is specifically referring to his perspective within the historical conditions of Fascist Italy (Spivak, "Preface" 209, n. 13). It is against this background of the formation of an organic intellectual that Spivak claims that a different situation exists in India today – one which allows for the elaboration of an intellectual organically articulated to "the recently denotified Indian tribes [that] had been millennially separated from the mainstream peasant underclass" (Spivak, "Preface" 209, n. 13). The formation of this new social group is defined through the efforts of organic intellectuals who, acting as intermediaries between the new group and other groups, develop new forms of intellectual work. Although Spivak offers a new definition of an organic intellectual, (one who has emerged from but still remains part of the peasant class), his/her function is still much as Gramsci describes: "The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist of eloquence [...] but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator [...]" (Gramsci 10). Redefining intellectual work as including "active participation in practical life" allows for the categorization of Devi's work, and of others in similar subaltern positions, as that of organic intellectuals. Nevertheless, assessing that Spivak's "traditional intellectual" work is different in kind from that of the "organic intellectual" work of Devi does not yet address the issue of hierarchy.

Spivak's name, at least in certain academic circles, is world renowned while that of Devi's enjoys a much smaller audience. This provides a clue to how their intellectual work is valued, at least within hegemonic discourse. This is not surprising given that, by definition, the work of an organic intellectual involves the elaboration of a new position vis-à-vis that of the dominant structure. There is no doubt that within the academy Spivak's production is given greater value, but the work of Devi and Spivak is a collaborative effort, it is both organic and traditional intellectual work and as such occupies a unique place. Unlike other efforts which may be said to be collaborative, such as ethnographies, where the anthropologist is subject and the native object, or testimonios (which I will address in greater detail below), where the narrated life of the subject is processed by an interlocutor, the separation between the work of Devi and Spivak is clear: Spivak has written a preface and afterword, as well as translated the stories, which were originally written by Devi in Bengali. Both also participate in a conversation that acts as a foreword and contextualizes Devi's position in the struggle for the rights of tribals in India. The point I would like to stress is that this is not merely a translation but a joint intellectual production by two intellectuals working together in responding to issues affecting the subaltern in India. I describe this as a collaboration keeping in mind the distinction Judith Butler makes, in another context, between collaboration and coalition:

> Despite the clearly democratizing impulse that motivates coalition building, the coalitional theorist can inadvertently reinsert herself as sovereign of the process by trying to assert an ideal form for coalition structures *in advance*, one that will effectively guarantee unity as the outcome. (Butler 14)

Even though the power relations involved in coalition building are more explicit, a mutually beneficial outcome being its goal, those involved in collaboration, whose outcome may not be known from the outset, are also present, albeit more implicitly. Nonetheless, the hybrid intellectual production of Devi and Spivak is only possible when there is a collaborative effort and not, as has been proposed by theorists in Cultural Studies, as the product of a single intellectual.[5]

Literature as Intervention

Although the collaborative work of Devi and Spivak may have entered academic discourse primarily based on the valuation of Spivak's previous work within (and by) that same discourse, and thus acknowledging an inherent hierarchy, it operates as a strategic intervention that locates specific sites of emerging resistance to hegemony.[6] The collaborative format of the project is a strategy that also offers the potential for its articulation elsewhere.

The collaborative strategy involves the use of literature to "straddle the gap between 'theory' and its setting-to-work outside the book" (Spivak 301). My specific interest in this strategy lies in attempting to investigate its postcolonial possibilities for the analysis of imperialist and neocolonial efforts whose site of deployment is "Latin America," and, more specifically, instances of resistance generated from within, instances of organic intellectual work such as the testimonio of Rigoberta Menchú.[7] Before discussing Menchú's work, and how its categorization as "literature" within U.S. academia may be seen as complicit with neocolonial endeavors, I will investigate

5 Stuart Hall has defined an "organic intellectual" as an individual who performs two functions simultaneously; she or he must 1) "know more than the traditional intellectuals do" and 2) be responsible for "transmitting those ideas, that knowledge, through the intellectual function, to those who do not belong, professionally, in the intellectual class" (Hall 281).

6 This project, therefore, avoids the criticism that theorists such as Benita Parry have voiced against theories of colonialism that assign "absolute power to the hegemonic discourse in constituting and disarticulating the native [...] Spivak in her project gives no speaking part to the colonized" (Parry 34f).

7 I will use the term "Latin America" within quotes to emphasize the problematic of disavowing the difference that exists within the region circumscribed by this term. This problematic is similar to that posed by the term "Third World" discussed below.

the unique and complex "postcolonial" conditions that operate in "Latin America," as opposed to say an Indian or African postcolonial situation.

Postcoloniality and 'Latin America'

Steven Bell, in his analysis of the relation of critical theory to Latin American literature, asserts that "Latin America still risks being left out of serious critical study and scholarly discourse" (Bell 3). Bell's concern is timely considering the impact of the theoretical work being done in postcolonial studies that addresses situations elsewhere. Bell elaborates that:

> With regard to the postcolonial, as with so many other critical/theoretical terms in current usage, the Latin American occupies an eccentric, a richly ambiguous, in-between position. These qualities, ironically, may make the Latin American case exemplary, even quintessentially postcolonial. The Latin American is not sufficiently white/European/imperial to be homogenized, nor sufficiently black/non-Western/colonial to be tokenized. It writes in Spanish, not in English – though this today is itself in question. Its formal independence came too long ago, and so it has not recently enough been "liberated," yet for this same reason, in many regards, it has always been "postcolonial," precocious rather than belated. (Bell 25, note 6)

Notwithstanding Bell's neglect in mentioning languages other than Spanish (and therefore colonial histories involving European powers other than Spain, e.g. Portugal, Holland, France and England, and languages such as creole and the various indigenous languages), he does raise issues that address the difficulty of a simple projection of postcolonial theories, developed for different situations, onto a "Latin American" situation. The fact that Bell is obviously referring to non-indigenous people when he speaks of the "Latin American" makes a position often elided in colonial discourse on "Latin America" visible – that of the indegene. This is the position occupied by those who may not necessarily speak Spanish, are sufficiently "black/non-Western/colonial," have not known independence since the conquest, and could be regarded as always already colonized.

A recent attempt to analyze the various colonial, imperialist, neocolonial, and postcolonial situations that have occurred in "Latin America" is J. Jorge Klor de Alva's "The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of 'Colonialism,' 'Postcolonialism,' and 'Mestizaje.'" His analysis discloses the complexity that is obscured behind facile binary constructions such as colonizer/colonized, a complexity that in the Americas necessitates the consideration of various factors, such as the ideologies of slavery and Marxism as well as identities such as criollo, mestizo, mulatto, and white. I will briefly focus my discussion on one of these factors, that of mestizaje, to illustrate its various strategic deployments in colonial and postcolonial discourse.

The dictionary defines mestizo as "a person of mixed European and American Indian ancestry,"[8] but, as Klor de Alva observes:

8 sub verbo "mestizo."

> mestizaje as a genetic and cultural hybridity has not only stood for a variety of processes and states at different times and places throughout the world, but even in Latin America the term and its cognates have never had an unequivocal sense. Its meanings have always been politically charged and these have always held a culturally ambiguous place in nation-building projects throughout the American hemisphere. It could not be otherwise. (Klor de Alva 243)

Mestizaje as an identity becomes particularly relevant, not only in differentiating the colonial experiences of the Americas from others, such as India and Africa, but also within the Americas themselves. This is especially pertinent when examining the difference between "Anglo-American" and "Latin American" attitudes toward miscegenation. Although Anglo-Americans reproduced with Native Americans and Africans, a hybrid category did not gain validity (Klor de Alva 249). This is not the case in "Latin America" where the term mestizo not only acknowledges these unions but at times is even used to refer to this hybrid identity as "a bronze race" in itself (Klor de Alva 259). The term invokes essentialist notions (for example the dictionary definition cited above posits "European" and "American Indian" as ontologically determined identities), and therefore its use is fraught with contradictions; at times it has been used to emphasize an indigenous ancestry while at other times the emphasis is on Western culture (Klor de Alva 253). Mestizaje is a constantly negotiated in-between state that foregrounds and destabilizes the essentialism of non-hybridity.

The formation of mestizo as an identity helps to explain why struggles for independence in Spanish-America were not, strictly speaking, decolonization efforts. These struggles were more civil wars fought by the colonizer-identified mestizos and criollos against their European counterparts – wars pitting colonizer against colonizer. "[I]t is misguided to present the preindependence, *non-Indian* sectors as colonized; it is inconsistent to explain the wars of independence as anticolonial struggles; and it is misleading to characterize the Americas, following the civil wars of separation, as composed of postcolonial states" (Klor de Alva 247). The characterization of these wars as secessionist struggles leaves the place of the indigenous population as a site that is at all times colonized. How can this position, which has not yet undergone decolonization, claim a postcolonial perspective?

The term "post-colonial" has been used to discuss "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonizaton to the present day" (Ashcroft et al. 2). It does not denote a linear temporality:

> [P]ostcoloniality is contained both within colonialism, as a Derridian supplement completing the meaning of this antecedent condition of dependent, asymmetrical relations, outside of it, by its questioning of the very norms that establish the inside/outside, oppressor (colonizer)/oppressed (colonized) binaries that are assumed to characterize the colonial condition. (Klor de Alva 245)

Therefore, a struggle such as that of the Maya-Quiché, which is a struggle against colonization, can still be discussed as a postcolonial struggle. As soon as there is colonialism there is a concomitant resistance that can be given the name postcoloniality.

One of the strategies deployed in response to colonialism has been the adoption of postcolonial identities. One such instance is the intellectual production of Rigoberta Menchú who, through lectures, organizing, and the publication of her testimonios, attempts to assume such a strategic postcolonial identity. What follows is a discussion of the function of testimonios as the product of that individual whom Gramsci described as a "permanent persuader" – the organic intellectual.

Woman, Indegene, Other: Rigoberta Menchú and Liberation Struggles

Menchú's testimonio is part of a process of making personal and communal identities. These identities are created by a commerce that involves the exchange of histories between and within the indigenous and the local, the local and the national, and, ultimately, the national and international forums of representation. This vertical exchange is disrupted by the testimonio that simultaneously articulates indigenous history at all levels of the system. I will specifically examine the negotiation between the sites of consumption and the sites of production of testimonios, including the role of the academy in the exchange of these histories. First I will summarize various definitions that have been used in attempts to fix the meaning of testimonios and then problematize these by discussing how the subject/object of testimonios is subsequently hypostatized by academic discourse as the authentic voice of the "other."

A testimonio is a difficult, if not impossible, thing to define. The word is Spanish for testimonial and therefore invokes legal connotations: it refers to a first-hand or an eyewitness account. The history of testimonios is brief and, although its mode of production owes much to US slave narratives, it begins as a Latin American form of self-writing with the accounts of revolutionary struggles written in the early 1960s. An early example is Ernesto (Ché) Guevara's *Pasajes de la guerra revolucionaria*, which describes the liberation struggle of Cuba.[9] In North American literary studies the term is used to refer to a number of writings that, similarly, document a "true" experience that would otherwise fall under one, or a combination, of the following genres: autobiography, ethnography, oral history, and biography.[10]

Although testimonios are first-person accounts, they are not autobiographies. Writing about the self is considered a Western invention and could be said to begin with Saint Augustine, but as a literary form it coincides with the rise of modernism. In "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," George Gusdorf observes that autobiography "expresses a concern peculiar to Western man, a concern that has been of good use in his systematic conquest of the universe and that he has communicated to men in other cultures" (Cited in Sommer 37). Testimonios attempt to complicate the genre of autobiography by substituting an individual, unified subject with a plural, divided one.

Fredric Jameson has discussed the relationship between autobiography and testimonio in "De la sustitución de importaciones literarias y culturales en el tercer mundo: El caso del testimonio." ["On the Substitution of Literary and Cultural Imports

9 For an analysis of guerrilla testimonios see Rojas.

10 Testimonio was first used as a literary term by Miguel Barnet to describe his ethnographic novel *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1968), which described the struggles of Esteban Montejo, a Cuban ex-slave (Yúdice 207).

in the Third World: The Case of the Testimonio."][11] He describes autobiography as a machine that produces a "centered subjectivity" formed out of an experience of fragmentation and atomization that is part of "bourgeois subjectivity." By contrast, he sees the testimonio as a sort of counter-autobiography that produces a "decentered subjectivity," a process that involves the multiplication of proper names:

> *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* by Elizabeth Burgos or "*Si me permiten hablar ...*" *Testimonio de Domitilia* by Moema Viezzer: these adjunct names are not merely names of editors or transcribers, and we certainly do not yet have an appropriate category to name their specific work, that can be analogous to the creativity of the translator. (Jameson, "Importaciones" 128-9)[12]

In addition to being described as editor or transcriber, other names suggested for this intermediary figure include ethnobiographer, interviewer, patron, promoter, and agent (Feal 102). This ambiguity can be seen in the case of Menchú's testimonio where the role of this intermediary figure is assigned different functions: Elizabeth Burgos is listed as the author in the original Spanish language edition, while she is listed as the editor in the English translation (Feal 101). As editors and translators often do, the "compiler" of a testimonio frames the work by providing an introduction, and at times a glossary and appendices; otherwise this figure remains silent. This silence makes it difficult to discern the extent of the compiler's contribution; it may entail the transcription of an oral account or it may be closer to a co-author's role. It is the ambiguity of the compiler's contribution to the text that helps create the effect Jameson describes as "decentered subjectivity."

Another dislocation of the author function is performed by the claim of the subject of the testimonio not only to self-representation but, concomitantly, the representation of a community. Doris Sommer suggests that the subject of the testimonio can be thought of as a "plural subject" (Sommer 38). Menchú begins her account by announcing:

> This is my testimony [...] I'd like to stress that it's not only *my* life, it's also the testimony of my people [...] The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people. (Menchú 1)[13]

11 Curiously, there does not appear to be a version of this essay published in English. Therefore, the following translations are mine.

12 The second testimonio Jameson refers to is that of a Bolivian woman, Domitila Barrios de Chungara, co-written with Moema Viezzer.

13 Similarly, Barrios' account begins: "I don't want anyone at any moment to interpret the story I'm about to tell as something that is only personal... What happened to me could have happened to hundreds of people in my country" (Barrios 15). Yet another example is that of Claribel Alegría's testimonial of a martyred heroine, Eugenia, an "exemplary model of self-denial, sacrifice and revolutionary heroism, that is a typical case rather than an exception of so many Salvadoran women who have dedicated their efforts and even their lives to the struggle for the people's liberation" (Sommer 38).

Menchú performs a double function: she speaks and, simultaneously, speaks *for* the Maya-Quiché. Sommer explains this metonymic relationship:

> The singular represents the plural, not because it replaces or subsumes the group, but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole [...] . [T]here is a fundamental difference here between the *metaphor* of autobiography and heroic narrative in general, which assumes an identity-by-substituting one (superior) signifier for another (I for we, leader for follower, Christ for the faithful), and *metonymy*, a lateral move of identification-through-relationship [...] The phenomenon of a collective subject of the testimonial is [...] a translation of a hegemonic autobiographical prose into a colonized language that does not equate identity with individuality. (Sommer 39, second emphasis added)

The plural subject of the testimonio replaces the individual of autobiography, an individual who, as is characteristic of humanist sensibilities, has mostly been gendered male (Sommer 37). In contrast, the authors of testimonios are generally women. Though, as I mentioned earlier, the history of testimonios includes accounts of revolutionary struggles by men, it is the struggles of women, particularly poor women, that make up the majority of recent testimonial writing.[14] And it is usually a woman who performs the task of compiling these histories.

In addition to the gender and the double function of the author, there is a third component common to testimonios – their place of origin is "Latin America." This means that the subject of the testimonio is multiply circumscribed by class, race, gender, and nationality (a category which necessarily implicates the others). These factors have enticed scholars, especially North American academics, to include this type of writing under the category of "Third-World Literature" or to discuss the problems raised by the protagonists as those shared by "Third-World Women," or, even more problematic, as instances when the "subaltern" speaks. Instead of allowing for a new space in which testimonios can be seen as simultaneously negotiating the colonial (indigenous/European), postcolonial (European and North American/Latin American) and neo-colonial (World Bank, NAFTA, GATT/Latin America), this form of writing is relegated to literary categories that lack positive political effectiveness. An analysis of these categories will help locate instances when their use in academia is complicit with the hegemonic discourse of capitalism.

Testimonios can be read as the "real narratives" that give "Third-World" literature histories and locations. Yet, the tendency to group these writings under one encompassing term defeats this purpose. This tendency becomes more generalized when the writings are selected to represent not just "Third-World literature" but "Third-World women," as has been pointed out by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her seminal critique.

14 In addition to the testimonios by Rigoberta Menchú and Domitila Barrios de Chungara and Clariel Alegría's, cited above, others that have recently received attention in the academy are: María Teresa Tula, *Hear My Tesimony: María Teresa Tula, Human Rights Activist of El Salvador*, Ana Guadalupe Martínez, *Las Cárceles clandestinas de El Salvador*; and the testimonial novel by Elen Poniatowska based on the life of Josefina Bórquez, *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*.

On a different level, the same problem is also addressed in Spivak's reading of Derrida. She describes Derrida's *différance* as a concept-metaphor, a name for a concept that, like the name "woman" or "writing," exists only as metaphor and does not have "an adequate literal referent" (Spivak, *Outside* 126). The name *différance* does not itself denote difference, just as the name "woman" does not denote an essence, nor the name "writing" a particular mode of writing. Another concept-metaphor that can be added to Spivak's list is the term "Third World," which does not refer to a certain place, as well as the terms produced when it is used as a modifier, such as "Third-World literature" and "Third-World woman."

Spivak warns of the danger of a concept-metaphor becoming a literal referent. Specifically, she fears the naturalization of the name "woman."[15] Derrida suggests that "woman" be one name that can stand for *différance*. Spivak realizes that "each of these names is determined by their historical burden in the most empirical way" and that "Derrida himself is also bound [...] by a certain set of historical presuppositions" (Spivak, *Outside* 133-134). She therefore suggests (re)placing "woman" as another name for the "subaltern" (Spivak, *Outside* 139). Attempting to avoid a naturalization and a neutralization of the name "woman," Spivak proposes the use of one concept-metaphor for another. Unlike Derrida's substitution, however, Spivak's has an overtly feminist agenda. Spivak quips that the place occupied by the "subaltern" is such a heterogeneous position that "the subaltern [becomes] the name of the place which is so displaced [...] that to have it speak is like Godot arriving on a bus" (Spivak, "Politics of the Subaltern" 91).

Similarly, testimonios as histories written by subalterns are multiply rewritten: first they are rewritten by the compiler of what is often an oral account; they are then rewritten by a translator who prepares this history for consumption in foreign markets; finally they are rewritten by academic discourse. The trade in testimonios is an uneven exchange; the indigenous people who are the subjects of these histories are seldom their consumers.[16]

Although the commerce of testimonios appears to be a dubious construction, there nevertheless can be a strategic usefulness in their trade if value is re-placed, if testimonios are treated as products of organic intellectuals rather than instances of "authentic" speaking subalterns. The "responsible resistance" of the organic intellectual is what is lost in the discourse on testimonios; when the subaltern speaks, her specific historical and geographic location is homogenized by this discourse. (This is most apparent when critics, no matter how sympathetic, invariably refer to authors of testimonios by their first name.) It is this sort of engagement that Kwame Anthony Appiah describes as a postcoloniality that is "the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery" (Appiah 348). This vision of a

15 Spivak cites as an example of this naturalization Foucault's use of the term "power" in History of Sexuality where "the name 'power' is systematically sold short for the 'thing' power" (Spivak, *Outside* 138).

16 Academic discourse on this literature is itself complicated by the fact that much of the work done on testimonios is written in Spanish by North American scholars, their ultimate audience apparently being "Latin American" scholars.

postcolonial practice that is complicit with hegemonic capitalist discourse is a strong warning against a type of scholarship that is irresponsive and irresponsible.

Conclusion

In my analysis of the place occupied by the work of Rigoberta Menchú, I call for the re-(e)valution of the testimonio as a literary category which should be analyzed within the historical specificities of its production and not as generic tales of the destitute.

I began my discussion by claiming that the space needed for the production of organic intellectual work, which in a postcolonial situation is the space denied the subaltern, can be opened by a collaborative effort such as that of Devi and Spivak. I then posited the possibility for the articulation of such a project, as well as postcolonial strategies in general, to the context of "Latin America." In this discussion I have not attempted an interpretation of Menchú's work, instead I have attempted to analyze the function of the academic in contextualizing its reception. I do not pretend that my analysis is in any way a collaboration with Menchú – if anything it is once again an appropriation of it. Nonetheless, a responsible response to situations involving United States colonialism, whether its neocolonialist relation to "Latin America" or its "internal colonialism," – such as the situations of indigenous, migrant, homeless, and "illegal" populations – necessitates listening to, in order to speak with, the subaltern. I have specifically discussed testimonios and some of the terms invoked in their discussion ("Third World," "Third-World literature," "Third-World woman," "woman," and "subaltern") in order to emphasize the danger of naturalization/neutralization that occurs when singular entities are made to occupy these concept-metaphors.

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Between Inside and Outside - Chicano/a Literary Discourse and the Search for the 'Subaltern'

MARKUS HEIDE

> We must abandon the dream of an outside or an inside that would provide firm footing, whether we call it "reality," "experience," or "consciousness."
>
> Elizabeth Meese 2

In my retrospective contribution I want to comment on some of the difficulties that I as an Americanist studying Chicano/a literature and cultural criticism have with the categories "critic" (for myself) and "subaltern" (for "those I study"). I consider both terms as too reductive when applied to the literary discourse of a "minority" in the USA and as simplifying the relationship of critic and text as well as ("postcolonial") author and text.

The workshop asked: "Can the Subaltern be Read?" Considering the Indian context as represented by Gayatri Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" ; I certainly do agree with her when she claims: "The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" (308). However, most of the participants of the workshop read "postcolonial" literatures. Does the workshop's title then imply that we as critics are reading the subaltern? Accepting Spivak's notion of the muteness of the subaltern I would negate this. In our workshop, however, the Spivakian definition of "the subaltern" was not orthodoxically followed. Rather, I got the impression, as Marc Colavincenzo proposed in his paper, that in the context of our workshop "the subaltern" seems to have been understood to mean any marginal group, or as Anne Zimmermann phrased it, "a person of inferior rank." Following these broad definitions, the assumption was in the air that the texts we are reading were written by subalterns, and hence we *are* "reading the subaltern." Only such an understanding of "the subaltern text" justifies an antitheoretical standpoint that wants to "let the text speak for itself," as we frequently find it in postcolonial and ethnic literary studies. In such an understanding of literary texts I cannot help but suspect an essentialist tendency of downplaying the question of textual representation. Furthermore, I think in postcolonial and ethnic studies we as critics easily run the danger of falling prey to such essentialist simplifications. Certain methodological assumptions that are widely acknowledged in literary studies – as the scepticism concerning mimetic reflection of reality, experience, or consciousness in literary texts – seem to become shaky when talking about texts of – Spivak's wording– "oppressed groups."

The subject, the object: text

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", referring to Marx, Spivak distinguishes two meanings of representation: "darstellen" (re-presentation as in art or philosophy) and "vertreten" (speaking for, as in politics). Spivak criticises Foucault and Deleuze for running these

two meanings of representation together (275). According to Spivak they valorize "the concrete experience of the oppressed" and assume that this concrete experience "is disclosed by the concrete experience of the intellectual" (275). In doing so, Spivak says, they are "uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual" (275). Spivak uses this critique to illustrate her scepticism of "leftist" theories that are built on "concrete experience" and the unquestioned assumption of (Eurocentric) intellectuals to represent (speaking for, *vertreten*) "the oppressed." In Foucault's political theory she sees a "clandestine restoration of subjective essentialism" (279) that can lead to a "dangerous utopianism" (280) if not accompanied by a theory of ideology.

Whether we follow Spivak or not, I find her allusions to "concrete experience" and the two senses of representation very helpful in clarifying my relationship as a critic to the texts I am reading. The texts of "the oppressed" I am reading *are not* "concrete experience" of the subaltern, but can only be *representing* (in both senses) experience. Thus neither in Spivak's nor in our workshop's broader understanding of the term are we as critics reading the subaltern. When claiming that "the subaltern cannot be heard or read", Spivak refers to the underprivileged "masses" who are without access to the institutions of the "superstructure." Unlike Spivak in her paper we as literary critics in postcolonial studies work with literary texts that are participating in literary discourses. However, the "concrete experience" (which Foucault and Deleuze valorize) remains inaccessible (at least for us as critics). There are always multiple layers of representation between the subaltern experience and the literary critic. The literary text is one such representation.

Ethnographers, who deal with "the Other" in a more direct way than literary critics, are involved in related methodological discussions problematizing the textual representation of ethnography's object, culture. James Clifford, Paul Rabinow, Johannes Fabian and others, who are opposed to a static notion of culture, have investigated the ethnographic strategies that, in their views, result in "Othering," in the construction of "authentic" culture by the ethnographer. However, "Othering" has not just been criticised as an imperialist gaze, but as a fundamental element that is inherent in writing, text and representation. Therefore "postmodern anthropology" does not only emphasize a dynamic understanding of culture which stresses the interdependence of cultures, but also shows how important a theory of the ethnographic text is for "decolonizing" and de-essentializing ethnography.

Reversing the focus, I want to propose an analogy between the ethnographer's representation of "the Other" and the postcolonial writer's representation of this "Other" or "Self." I don't want to imply that their representations are the same, or that both kinds of texts face the same methodological, theoretical, and political problems. But both can only give representations of what they perceive (e.g. in fieldwork) or experience (as "postcolonial" writers). This mutual imprisonment of ethnographer and "postcolonial" writer in the limitations of communication, "that inescapable difference between appearance and reality" (Tyler 56), indicates the power ideologies, cultural symbolism and language play in both their representations of "concrete experience" and "reality."

Trying to come closer to the elusive "subaltern", it cannot suffice to only read the literary text – and "let it speak for itself," as some suggested in our workshop – but just as much the critic has to read the local productions of knowledge, as there is no

authentic voice of the "subaltern," or in Spivak's words, there is no "pure consciousness" (279). Hence we have to look at the reciprocal exchange between theoretical discussions, ideological constructions, traditions, and literary texts.

By outlining two rather recent attempts by Gloria Anzaldúa and Guillermo Gómez-Peña of redefining Chicanoness as a non-essentialist counter-narration, and by paraphrasing Néstor García Canclini's notion of cultural hybridity I want to show how identity formation and global discursive interrelatedness are reflected in Chicano literary discourse. Reading these heterogeneous texts that defy easy classification (as fiction, poetry, autobiography, or theory) I want to comment on some of the topics we discussed during the two day-workshop: authenticity, textuality, identity, and ideology.

Space: deterritorialized signs

The work of the Argentinian cultural anthropologist Nestór García Canclini can be read as representative of theoretical re-orientations in Latin American and Chicano cultural theory. García Canclini's theory of hybridity marks a shift in Latin American thought because he refuses to continue to think in bi-polar, teleological models, as they were characteristic of Latin American political theory. In his examination of mass-culture, high-culture and folk-art in Mexico he shows how inappropriate exclusive (static) definitions have become, and that distinctions of cultural spheres (as high, mass, popular, folk culture) no longer correspond with social reality in Latin America.

His study of intercultural conflict in the Mexican border-zone of the USA and Mexico in many respects applies to "hybridity" as it is discussed in Chicano cultural criticism. When García Canclini says about Tijuana, the Mexican border city neighboring San Diego: "uno de los mayores laboratorios de la posmodernidad" (293), ("one of the biggest laboratories of postmodernity"), he refers to cultural hybridity and ubiquitous simulation of cultural "authenticity" in this city. Tijuana, which in 1950 only counted about 60.000 inhabitants, today is a city of more than one million. Migrants of various Mexican regional and indigenous cultures gather in this border town. Many are driven by the desire "to cross." Others find work related to tourism in Tijuana, as three to four million "first-world-tourists" visit the city each year. García Canclini shows in his *Culturas Híbridas* how this clash of cultures results in a massive mixture of cultural codes. Mexican migrants, originally attracted by the wealth of the USA to come north, simulate Mexican "authenticity" for North American tourists. The brutality of the US-border that most migrants experience in this city is covered up with luring advertisements for American consumer products, simulating "USA" in Mexico.

One of the central arguments García Canclini's theoretical redefinition of Latin American cultural identity is based on, is that cultural signs are decentered and deterritorialized. Extending Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social classes he argues that due to transnational media and multidirectional migration, *colecciones* – systems of signs, things and symbols, that are restricted to certain groups and classes – have become transparent. Thus, social and geographic spaces do not correspond to these *colecciones* anymore. Therefore the resulting "hybrid cultures" borrow from and unify cultural code-systems of different "origins." According to García Canclini the interaction of cultures in this border area results in hybrid identities that, although the

individual might hold on to a traditional cultural code, are able to master "multitemporal heterogeneity" (23).[1]

Acknowledging this cultural hybridity has led to attempts of redefining Chicanoness. Such redefinitions stress the interrelation between different cultural spheres and the dynamic character of cultural identity. Hybridity is not just understood as a "subaltern" phenomenon, but as a theoretical approach to culture in general, because detecting hybridity only in the subaltern's text would run the danger of re-establishing "authentic originals." Thus Chicano critics and writers refuse to be solely perceived as participating in a "minority discourse." Instead, de-essentialising the term "Chicano" and disclosing "differences inside" and "interconnections outside" has enabled these discussions to explore different paths into globalized discourses.

Repossessing Space – the Making of a Center

As the contemporary "local" productions of theory and literature are in parts a reaction to earlier notions of homogenous, essentialist Chicanoness, I want to briefly paraphrase the genealogy of "the Chicano" before representing the rather recent re-definitions of Chicanoness.

Chicano history begins in 1848 when Mexico lost half of its territory to the USA. Since then Mexicans inhabiting the area – today the Southwest of the USA –have had to suffer from Anglo-American domination. Thus, historically the "birth of the Chicano" can be easily traced. This has resulted in such apparently unproblematic definitions as: Chicanos are "men and women, who live in the USA and trace their ancestry to Mexico" (Shirley 9). However, when scrutinizing the group of Chicanos more thoroughly, a new historical "reality" emerges. Only a very small proportion of the Spanish-speaking ("Latino-") population of the USA can trace their ancestry back to the Mexican past of the Southwest. Instead, a rapidly growing number of Latinos are migrants or descendents of migrants from post-1848-Mexico or other parts of Latin America.

Considering the heterogeneous, migratory character of the demographically strong Mexican-American Latino groups the "ideological birth" of "the Chicano" can be attributed to the "Chicano *movimiento*" of the mid-1960s. Only then did the term "Chicano" – which till then was applied to lower-class Mexicans by the upper class (Shirley 10) – become popular among "Mexican-Americans" who struggled for equal rights and recognition of their traditions in the USA. The term united "Mexican-Americans" and constructed an identity of a population that no longer wanted to be a hyphenated supplement to ruling "white" America. As a group that has inhabited the Southwest of the USA longer than Anglo-Americans, Chicanos defined themselves in political terms as a "conquered minority," as dispossessed of their land and suffering from "internal colonialism." During the movement Chicano nationalism was directed against US society, which, as it was argued, refused to recognize the long traditions of Chicanos in the USA.

In addition to the strong ties to Mexico, Chicano cultural nationalism is strongly based on the myth of "Aztlán", the Aztecs mythical homeland to the North in what is

1 For criticism of García Canclini's notion of hybridity see Carlos Rincón, Petra Schumm, and Irina Buche (Scharlau).

believed to be the Southwestern United States. This idea of a homeland distinguishes the identity formation of Chicanos from that of other minorities in the USA, except Native Americans. Both the term "Chicano" and the myth of Aztlán underwent a revival (and were partly invented) in the 1960's Chicano *movimiento*. The third constituent of Chicano cultural nationalism which also became popular during the movimiento is the pride in *la Raza*. This rather vaguely comprises all "Spanish speaking *mestizos*" (Shirley 11) and combines Mexican concepts of *mestizaje* with the theories of "la raza cósmica" of the Mexican politician and philosopher José Vasconcelos. In the 1920s he posited "that the peoples of mixed indigenous and European bloods throughout the Americas would one day develop into a "superior race" (Munoz 80). In the vocabulary of the heyday of the Chicano *movimiento* one could say, *la Raza* reclaimed their homeland Aztlán. Thus the ideology of Chicano-identity is constructed of several cultural, national and historical backgrounds: the pre-Columbian Indian past, the Spanish-Mexican period and the Anglo-period from 1848 to the present.

Despite the importance of political parties such as *La Raza Unida* and of farm-workers' and students' strikes in the formation of Chicano identity, the role of literary discourse should not be underestimated. During and after the Chicano movement Chicano literature, literary criticism and cultural criticism contributed to constructing an identity that centered around the terms Aztlán, *la Raza*, *mestizaje* and homeland. By doing so, Chicano literary discourse reclaimed literary traditions that had been neglected by US society. Chicano literary discourse, since the late 1960s institutionalized in Chicano Studies Departments, can therefore just as much as literature itself be seen as "a form of postcolonial identity formation" (Pérrez-Torres 24).

Like other anti-colonial and post-colonial discourses, Chicano literature has from its inception been situated in a political struggle against a "center." Hence many critics have characterized Chicano literature as a literature of resistance, resistance against "internal colonialism," racism and exploitation in the USA. During the *movimiento* US-society was perceived as the enemy and the fight for Aztlán was understood as a fight against US-imperialism. and many writers (uncritically) celebrated their Mexican and Indian ancestry. The radical poet Alurista, who was one of the leading figures of the Chicano movement, illustrated the clear demarcation against Anglo-America posited during the movement by stating: "We have to expel the Yankees from our heart" (Pérrez-Torres 34).

Disclosing Differences, Decentering Identities: Inside

However, the definition of "Chicano politics" has undergone certain changes after the decline of Chicano political activism and the establishment of Chicano's Studies departments at US-universities. In the 1980s Chicanoness as defined by the spokesmen of the *movimiento* was criticized by writers and critics. Assumptions of "collective experience," "Chicano reality" and "Raza consciousness" that are central in Chicano cultural nationalism came under attack from different quarters. Chicano nationalism has since been criticised as reproducing Mexican machismo, as being homophobic and misogynous. Women writers claimed to have been neglected by the *movimiento*. Also, the work of writers who didn't make their Chicanoness explicitly a topic (e.g. John

Rechy) and had therefore been denied the status of "Chicano writer," has been revaluated. More recent literary and cultural criticism rejects simplifying dichotomies, writes "against the male centered text emphasizing silenced gender" (Chabram 87), and tries "to articulate the interconnection between the colonizers and the colonized" (Pérrez-Torres 30).

This critique from within has inspired a redefinition of Chicanoness, Chicano literature, and the relationship of both to mainstream literature. Writers and critics attempt to articulate a resistant and – at the same time – hybrid identity that avoids "reverse ethnocentrism." Referring to this new Chicano/a literature and literary criticism of the 1980's and 1990's, Rafael Pérrez-Torres writes:

> Rather than think [...] in terms of "origin" or "authenticity" [...] Chicano literature challenges its readers to consider the processes of identity construction. Decentering EurAmerican claims of authority and identity, Chicano literature cannot in good conscience turn around and posit another alternate but equally prohibitive claim to authority. Indeed, constituents whose identities were overlooked in the early proclamation of identity – primarily among them Chicanas, lesbians, and gays – rail against the essentialist myths surrounding claims to "experience" and "reality." (30)

A writer who focuses on processes of identity construction and differences within is Gloria Anzaldúa. Her *Borderlands – La Frontera* is (1) a political text directed against white-"Gringo"-domination, (2) an unveiling of differences among Chicanos/as and (3) an attempt to redefine Chicano/a-ness. The first chapter of *Borderlands-La Frontera*, entitled "The Homeland – Aztlán / El otro México," ends with the following lines:

> This is her home
> this thin edge of
> barbwire. (13)

It is a repetition of the same lines which we find earlier in a series of first person poems that are clearly autobiographical:

> This is my home
> this thin edge of
> barbwire. (3)

As the text which includes personal poetry, historiographic quotes, racist Anglo-American hymns of the 19th century and autobiographical sketches, "my home" unfolds changes into "her home." At the end the referent of the personal pronoun is a Mexican woman, who has spent all her money to get smuggled into the USA. The three lines end the migration story of this anonymous Mexican who falls prey to Mexican robbers, is raped by the *Coyote* (smuggler), has to work for a low wage in Chicago and suffers from poverty, isolation and cultural alienation. The autobiographical Chicana *I* changes into the Mexican migrant *She*. Thus the Chicano experience of Anzaldúa's family who has been living in the Southwest of the USA for centuries, has in the flow of the narration of the heterogeneous text transformed into a contempory migration experience, the "silent invasion" of the USA.

The chapter can be read as a deconstruction and reconstruction of the history of Chicanos and of the myths that Chicano identity is built on. What started off with a reference to the Chicano myth of origin, the homeland Aztlán, and a characterization of Chicanos as a tribe, the "*Aztecas del norte*," ends with a juxtaposition of the word "home" with words that have such unhomely connotations as "thin," "edge" and "barbwire." This can be read as a demystification of the homeland Aztlán-trope that is so popular in Chicano literature. In that respect Anzaldúa historicises the myth when she confronts earthbound Chicanoness with the sufferings of a contemporary Mexican migrant in the USA. Chicano nationalism and contemporary migrant experience are juxtaposed, whereby Anzaldúa exposes the difference and contradictions within Chicanoness of being USA-born or a migrant. In the following chapters Anzaldúa extends this critique of Chicano nationalism to patriarchal thinking and homophobia in *Chicanismo*.

However, *Borderlands – La Frontera* aims at more than disclosing contradictions within Chicano nationalism. Anzaldúa tries to redefine Chicanoness in her concept of "New Mestiza Consciousness." Her "New Mestiza" disrupts static conceptions of identity, cultural homogeneity and essentialism. She decenters identity by attributing symbolic value to the border between the USA and Mexico and uses this symbolic border for a construction of an identity in "the borderlands," a hybrid consciousness, an "in-between"-position. This "New Mestiza consciousness" of the borderlands rejects thinking in dichotomies: "What we are suffering from is the absolute despot duality that says we are to be only one or the other." (19)
Thus she calls for a dissolution of borders in thinking and writing, and in her understanding of Chicanoness the image of Aztlán is no longer a (centered) "homeland" but becomes a (decentered) "borderland":

> A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition. (3)

In this undetermined place of "the borderlands" dichotomies that are prevalent in Western thought, such as rationality/spirituality and history/myth or socio-political categories such as heterosexual/homosexual, Indian/Mexican, USA/Mexico, male/female dissolve. However, Anzaldúa doesn't claim that conflicts disperse or should be ignored. On the contrary, she displays conflicts throughout the text and doesn't propose solutions. It is the undecided, contradictory and constantly shifting position of the Chicana in the borderlands that Anzaldúa claims as the new, hybrid Chicanoness which calls for "a tolerance for ambiguity" (79):

> [The] numerous possibilities leave la mestiza floundering in uncharted seas. In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts of ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behaviour; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. [...] The mestiza turns the ambivalence into something else. (79)

Anzaldúa attributes a symbolic meaning to the borderlands between Mexico and the USA. The borderlands stand for the multiple, hybrid identity of Chicanos/as. She decenters Chicanoness and unveils the homeland Aztlán as a hybrid borderland that disrupts static notions of identity. Decenteredness and non-static identity are proclaimed as characteristics of resistant Chicananess.

Disclosing Kinship, Decentering Identities: Outside

Similar to Anzaldúa, the performance artist and poet Guillermo Gomez-Peña attempts to decenter Chicano experience.

> U.S. Latino culture is not homogenous. It includes a multiplicity of artistic and intellectual expressions both rural and urban, traditional and experimental, marginal and dominant. These expressions differ, depending on their creator's class, sex, nationality, ideology, geography, political context, degree of marginality or assimilation, and the time spent in the United States. (48)

Gomez-Peña, who as a Mexican artist migrated to the USA and identifies himself as a Chicano in his work explores the position of the artist who feels "at home/not at home" in different cultures and subcultures. In his performance *Border Brujo* he explores his "Pan-American" identity and incorporates quotes from Mexican and Chicano tradition ranging from Aztec deities to "East Los Angelos Chicano Punk." Gomez-Peña reveals the disjunctions he experiences in different communities, first, in the USA as a Mexican (Chicano) experimental artist: "I came following your dream & your dream became my nightmare" (77), then in Mexico as an expatriot *Americanized* artist: "they say my art is a declaration against the Holy Virgin of Mexican aesthetics" (85), and third, among Chicanos as a Mexican migrant: "they say I wasn't born in East L.A., they say I sound like Pablo Neruda gone punk "(85).

During the performance the figure *Border Brujo* constantly changes his identity and confronts the audience with an assembly of native American, Mexican and US traditions. As Gomez-Peña says, the *brujo* "spoke through ten different personae in four languages (Spanish, English, Spanglish, and tongues) about the fragmentation of the border self" (29). During the performance Gomez-Peña disguises himself in costumes that overemphasize certain ethnic signs, and combines traditional Mexican styles with fetishes of US consumer culture and stereotypical attributes of Mexicans.

However, playing with "ethnic signs" should not merely be understood as postmodern eclecticism but rather as an artistic expression of the clash of cultures Chicanos are confronting in the borderlands. The *border brujo* is staged as a non-static figure, that is part of/is not part of, is at home in/is not at home in cultural systems. His transformations and constant changes of identity oppose cultural stasis. He confronts the brutal and violent aspects of the actual Mexican/USA-border life but also unfolds the utopian dimensions of a (borderless) border existence. Thus *Border Brujo* can be read as a utopian declaration of a borderless world and as opposing hegemony and domination of any kind.

In its manifestation of cultural hybridity Gomez-Peña's work – from another perspective than Anzaldúa's – concentrates on the dissolution of borders. Despite the autobiographical aspects of his work, Gomez-Peña attributes a universal character to

the borderlands. For in his understanding, the Chicano experience of hybrid cultural identity is representative of a global situation in an era of technological networks and mass-produced consumer culture:

> We witness the borderization of the world, byproduct of the "de-territorialization" of vast human sectors. The borders either expand or are shot full of holes. Cultures and languages mutually invade one another. (39)

Gomez-Peña doesn't want to make the local global but aims at the interrelatedness of the local and the global. Although he stresses the specificity of the Chicano border existence, he also sees certain parallels between his social reality and global transformations that occur through a deterritorializing of signs. Thus his "borderization of the world" corresponds with Nestór García Canclini's *Culturas Híbridas* and the decentering and deterritorializing of signs. From this perspective of living in a hybrid (global) borderland he doesn't seek to "expel the Yankee from the Chicano heart," as did the poet Alurista during the Chicano movement, but wants to recontextualize Chicanoness within mainstream culture in the USA and Mexico:

> In this very delicate historical moment, Mexican artists and intellectuals as well as Chicanos and Anglos should try to "recontextualize" ourselves, that is to say, search for a "common cultural territory," and within it put into practice new models of communication and association. (41)

Between Inside and Outside: the Subaltern and the Critic

Gloria Anzaldúa's "new mestiza consciousness" and Guillermo Gomez-Peña's "borderization of the world" are attempts at redefining Chicano/a identity. Both writers refer to concepts of cultural hybridity Néstor García Canclini has come across in the borderlands of the USA and Mexico. All three authors reject bi-polar thinking and simplifying dichotomies. As I have shown, accepting "the enemy within," as Anzaldúa puts it, acknowledging contradictions and ambivalences in one's own individual and collective identity, is characteristic of contemporary Chicano/a literary discourse. Although opposed to dominant US-society, Chicano/a writers and critics positing a hybrid notion of cultural identity see and depict themselves as part of this society, as critic Juan Rodríguez writes:

> Whether we like it or not, we have incorporated – some more than others – a vision of the world belonging to the dominant classes, and consequently our actions – including literary creation – will be mediated by these circumstances (175)

Class and gender differences among Chicanos and Chicanas, and the position of Chicanos/as in-between two nations, "first" world and "third" world, different cultures, mass-produced pop-culture and indigenous traditions, make it difficult for the critic to search for *the* subaltern in texts by Chicanos and Chicanas. In additon, as I have shown, the ideology of Chicano cultural nationalism has strongly influenced literary depictions of Chicano/a life. Even recent redefinitions of Chicanoness participate in the narrative of identity.

Certainly, this participatory role of literature in socio-political contexts is not Chicano-specific. Other mainstream literatures are not autonomous (although many might claim differently) and have to be read in their socio-political context. As a critic to simply "let the literary text speak for itself" (and assuming to be reading the subaltern) seems to be in danger of "othering" a complex discourse, of proposing an authentic "other" voice. But, as Spivak puts it, rejecting Adorno's understanding of "ideology as false consciousness" (274), there is no such thing as "pure consciousness" (279) and hence no "pure" text reflecting "concrete experience."

I would suggest, that in the field of Chicano/a literary discourse, rather than ascribing a marginal position to ("subaltern") Chicano literature, it should be read in the context of the specificity of Chicano literary and cultural criticism as a cultural critique of the USA "within the USA." Such a reading can intervene against clearcut authentic notions of inside and outside positions, as Ramon Saldívar says about his work:

> [T]he narrative writings of Chicano women and men must be understood as different from and in resistance to traditional American literature, yet must also be understood in their American context. [...] I show that Chicano narrative is not content with merely reproducing the world but also attempts to reveil the ideological structures by which we continue to create that world. (9)

The "we" here is to be understood as a universal "we." While we (as critics) are "reveiling ideological structures," we are at the same time "creating the world" which means, we are ourselves reproducing other ideological structures. As I understand Spivak and her "Marxist skepticism of concrete experience" (281), it is impossible to represent the "nonrepresented subject" (279) and at the same time remain "transparent" oneself. This holds true in the case of the European intellectuals Foucault and Deleuze, the "critic in postcolonial studies," as well as the "postcolonial" writer.

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Can 'the Subaltern' be Questioned?

MARC COLAVINCENZO

It seems to me that in the course of any study it becomes necessary at some stage to re-examine the base assumptions and ideas upon which the study operates. An idea or term, for example, accretes layers of use (and misuse) with time like calcium deposits, to the point at which the original idea, the root of its usage, becomes buried under layers of possibilities, connotations, interpretations. This return to first principles is an attempt to make clear the idea which lies at the core of the study, to chip away the accretions for a moment. Meanings shift, that is clear. This return to first principles, however, does not hammer the possible meanings of an idea or term into place. If shifting has occurred, re-examining the roots lets one chart the shift, perhaps understand its causes or agendas. What I propose to do here is to examine the term "subaltern" in terms of what I consider to be a very important aspect – the fact that its definition must be differential and not essential – and then to trace the consequences of this differentiality with regard to our use of the term.

The OED defines the word "subaltern" as follows: "A person (or thing) of inferior rank or status; a subordinate."[1] If one breaks the word down into its latin roots the meaning is essentially a person or thing "of lower condition or degree (or size) than the other." My purpose in offering these definitions is not to declare monolithically that they are the definitions, but instead to highlight the differential nature of the term which, I believe, one cannot avoid.[2] Gayatri Spivak makes this point quite clearly in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" The subaltern is, in Spivak's words, "an identity-in-differential" (79). She cites the definition proposed by Ranajit Guha in which, having decribed the elite, he defines the subaltern as "represent[ing] the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'" (qtd. in Spivak 79). The crucial point is that the subaltern always stands in subordinated relation to some "Other" – in Guha's example, the elite. This means that the subaltern is inextricably linked with the Other and when we talk about the subaltern we talk, by implication, about the Other. The Other is not fixed, for there are many possible Others to which the subaltern stands in relation; therefore the subaltern has no fixed valency or degree of relation. Essentially, then, the subaltern has no stable identity, no fixed definition: the degree of relation is the identity of the

1 I am aware of the irony of using the Oxford English Dictionary to define the term "subaltern" in such a context. However, it is an irony which must remain for lack of other possibilities, and an irony "negotiated," to use Gayatri Spivak's word, by the very awareness of it.

2 As mentioned above, this is not to hammer the term into place with *my* definitive nail taken from the OED. I am aware of other contexts, whether it be Antonio Gramsci's in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* or Spivak's focus on it as a concept-metaphor (which I will enlarge on later) in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. But in these contexts, too, I see that aspect of the term which is of main interest to me here and which becomes clear in the OED definition(s): its differentiality.

subaltern precisely because it is "an identity-in-differential." It follows that the subaltern is a multi-layered grouping, a cipher, in several senses of the word. But our language will deceive us if we are not careful. To use the notion of "the subaltern" as a catch-all noun occludes this multi-layering and can lead to a vision of a homogeneous group, whereby one soon ends up reducing the subaltern individuals to an undifferentiated mass.[3] Suddenly, "eurocentric generalizations" which we hope to avoid are hovering uncomfortably near. Therefore, I will use "Subaltern" with a capital to refer to the subaltern as grouping, and "subaltern" in lower case to refer to layers and levels within this grouping.

Let us look at the question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak answers her own question negatively: no, the subaltern cannot speak. She/he is not heard, "passes outside of written history" (Dutta email). But to whom can the subaltern not speak? One must assume here that as addressee Spivak means the Other to whom the subaltern is subaltern. And why can the subaltern not speak? Presumably because of her/his state of subalternity. To whom else might the subaltern individual try to speak and with what success? To herself/himself? Yes; this possibility of communication is open to her/him. To other subalterns, whether individuals or groups? Possibly; and this is where recognition of the multi-layered nature of the Subaltern is necessary. Subalternity is a relative position, and this relativity will be found not only across the border between the Subaltern and the Other, but also within the Subaltern. This implies multiple subaltern positions within the Subaltern, with multiple corresponding Others. If we accept Spivak's claim that it is not possible for a subaltern to speak within a subaltern-Other relationship, any subaltern individual can speak only to other subaltern individuals or groups that have the same position relative to a particular Other. This means that speech is indeed possible for the subaltern individual, but it is extremely contextualized and only horizontal, not vertical: i.e., from a position relative to a listener in which the subaltern individual is not subaltern.[4] Again, the idea of a homogeneous Subaltern is one which needs to be constantly guarded against.

3 In *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Spivak considers the term "subaltern" to be a concept-metaphor for which "one cannot locate an adequate literal referent" (126). A few pages later, she declares herself wary of a concept-metaphor being "sold short" for a literal referent precisely because it might "naturalize" said concept-metaphor (138). This would seem to be my agenda here and in what follows – to find "an adequate literal referent" for the term "subaltern." However, although the method seems at odds with Spivak's, I think my aims are in line with hers. I too wish to avoid "naturalization" of the term, but precisely by pulling it out of its abstract, theoretical usage and looking for this literal referent, all the time realizing that a fully "adequate literal referent" does not exist. Spivak herself, then, admits the usefulness of such a move if one is vigilant and aware of what one is doing: "Incanting to ourselves all the perils of transforming a 'name' to a referent–making a catechism, in other words, of catachresis – let us none the less name (as) 'woman' that disenfranchised woman whom we strictly, historically, geopolitically cannot imagine, as a literal referent" (139).

4 In her preface to *Imaginary Maps*, a book of short stories by Mahasweta Devi, it seems that Spivak rethinks her claim that the subaltern cannot speak. She says, "[w]hen the subaltern 'speaks' in order to be heard and gets into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance, he or she is on the way to becoming an organic intellectual" (xxvi). She is referring here to Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual as those intellectuals which "every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic

The same, then, is true for the question "Can 'the Subaltern' be Read?" First one asks "By whom?", and again one will see that horizontal reading is possible, but not vertical reading. This question is obviously indebted to Spivak's question. But when one looks at its relation to Spivak's question, one sees that a subtle yet significant change has occurred. The subaltern individual has been shifted here from a state of activity into a state of passivity. She/he has gone from (the possibility of) "speaking" to "being read," from (possibly) acting to being acted upon, from (possible) subject to object. The very language we use at the moment of our post-colonial critical questioning subtly enacts colonial disempowerment.

But can our question even exist? Is it possible to ask the question "Can 'the Subaltern' be Read?" If it is true that an individual or group in a subaltern position cannot speak, then it simply follows that they cannot be read. Any text which comes to us, is available for us to read, cannot have been written from, uttered from, a subaltern position, because of the very fact that we are reading it. To account for this and to have our question make sense, to "create" a "subaltern" text which we can read, some sort of tactical move would be necessary. I see two possibilities: one could accept what seems to be Spivak's rethought conclusion and say that the subaltern individual can indeed speak, not just horizontally (in a relation where her/his subalternity does not exist), but vertically from a subaltern position; or, if the conclusion that the subaltern individual cannot speak holds, one could create for one's purposes a specialized, shifted definition of "Subaltern" as "any marginal group," which seems to be the meaning in the context of this workshop. However, both of these moves are problematical. With regard to the first move, aside from the problem already outlined in regard to Spivak's rethought conclusion,[5] to assume that a subaltern can speak and be read from a subaltern position, allowing for this verticality, sets the critic (us) in a position above the writer. If we have a given subaltern text in our hands and have declared that the subaltern individual has a voice and that we have access to her/his text, then the very fact that we have this so-called subaltern text in our hands both sets us up as the (benevolent) Other-reader to this subaltern-writer, and foregrounds and strengthens her/his very position as subaltern. We have declared our position as the "supra-altern."

The second possibility, then, is to shift the definition of Subaltern to mean "any marginal group." As mentioned, this does seem to be the meaning of the term for this

production, creates together with itself, organically, [...] which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields" (Gramsci 5). However, this move towards becoming an "organic intellectual" which Spivak seems to see as an instance of the subaltern speaking is not convincing for me, in that it seems to represent a basic split with the Subaltern. Since the subaltern is precisely that which "passes outside of written history" (Dutta), since it is that which "has been left out of [...] a definition" of "national identity" (Spivak, preface, *Imaginary Maps* xxiv), then the "organic intellectual" coming from the subaltern classes with a voice to inscribe herself/himself into history must by nature lose her/his "subalternity"– exactly Gramsci's point when he states that "the mass of the peasantry [...] does not elaborate its own 'organic' intellectuals" (Gramsci 6). At most, it represents to me an instance of the Subaltern being spoken *for*, but not an instance of the subaltern speaking. I see at work here a definite split and shift.

5 See footnote 4.

workshop. Any text, then, by a writer who belongs to a "marginal group" becomes a subaltern text. Seeing that such texts do exist, we have something to study, and we can ask our question "Can 'the Subaltern' be Read?" But here too we are faced with the same problem as above. We shift this word "subaltern" onto a group of people who are (in our estimate) marginal, and immediately we are reinforcing perceived power relations and hierarchies. In addition, however, this makes the term "subaltern" even more slippery than it already is. It becomes more difficult to determine precisely who falls (more precisely expressed: whom *we* categorize) under the term "subaltern." Let us consider this in regard to Canada, where such a shifted meaning of "subaltern" would essentially describe minority groups within Canada; quite simply, texts produced by members of these minority groups would be considered subaltern texts. Under this scheme, the Sri Lankan immigrant text in Canada would be considered a subaltern text. But in what way, according to this definition, is Michael Ondaatje to be understood as a subaltern writer and his texts as subaltern texts? Simply because he was born in Sri Lanka?[6] Ondaatje is in any case beyond such simple classifications, but to classify him as a subaltern writer and, therefore, to classify a text of his such as *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* right beside Austin Clarke's "Canadian Experience" as subaltern in this particular way is misguided. That one could possibly see *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* as a subaltern text in a certain, different sense (the work's subtitle is *Left Handed Poems*) only makes the subaltern more complex, harder to pin down. The notion of the subaltern as cipher, as an empty space which can be filled in many different ways, becomes even more apparent.

I would like to illustrate briefly this particular point by "reading the subaltern" in a few Canadian short stories; and by "reading the subaltern" I mean reading with attention to the extent to which the author *might* be concerned with the issue of subalternity. The first story is Himani Bannerji's "The Other Family." This very short story revolves around an Indian child who, when asked to draw a picture of her family, draws it as a "white family." She finally redraws the picture, which she then calls a picture of "the other family" (145). The story is extremely programmatic, the concern with the issue of subalternity is apparent – inscribed in its very title – and we are presented with no difficulties in reading the subaltern. By comparison, Austin Clarke's "Canadian Experience" is much more complex. The central character has been unemployed for some time now and has applied for a job in a bank. However, it soon becomes obvious that the character, an immigrant from Barbados, has no chance of getting the job because he lacks education and experience; and he doesn't even go to the interview. The construction of the subaltern here is much subtler than in the Bannerji story. It is mentioned only briefly that he was "in and out of low-paying jobs

6 I am reminded here of Spivak's warning in "How to read a 'culturally different' book" (although in a different context) about the temptation to "fetishise national origin" (143). This issue comes up in an interview with Ondaatje conducted by Linda Hutcheon, which is to be found in *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*. Hutcheon mentions the criticism Ondaatje has received "for being more concerned with 'aesthetic' issues [...] than with the specific social and cultural conditions of being a Sri Lankan writing in Canada" (197). Ondaatje replies, "[a]s a writer I don't think I am concerned with art and aesthetic issues any more than I would want to be just concerned with making the subject of being a Sri Lankan in Canada my one and only subject" (198), and later adds quite simply "I can write about whatever I want to write about" (202).

given specifically to non-landed immigrants" (53) and his skin colour is only mentioned by an acquaintance of his in that he is "too black to wear brown" (55). Instead, Clarke weaves together images of the way the character dresses ("He was not dressed the way he had hoped to appear, and his image was incorrect", 49), the newspapers he reads, his obvious lies about his education, and his inability to enter the opulent bank for the interview – all this in order to construct the subalternity of his character. The character doesn't have "Canadian experience," there are times at which he doesn't grasp the rules of the game, so to speak; but it is not clear in Clarke's story to what extent the main character himself carries some responsibility for his position and situation. Here, we must be careful when reading the subaltern. Finally, Rohinton Mistry's "Swimming Lessons" is a text which defies a reading of the subaltern. The central character, an immigrant from India now living in Toronto, is obsessed with water and his inability to swim. At the same time, he is writing a book of short stories, a fact we only learn about in scenes of his parents in India reading a copy of his book, which he has sent to them. Except for an incident in passing where some children at a swimming pool deride him racially, an incident which the central character then makes absurd by imagining it as a racist plot centered on the pool, the character's race plays no role. Nor is it apparent how one should read the story as subaltern – again, as with Ondaatje, simply because Mistry comes from India?

My point here is to provide some indication of the complexity and pitfalls of the Subaltern text if it is simply defined as a text produced by a writer from a marginal group. We have three different writers, all of whom would be classified as subaltern according to the above definition – but three very different texts, in which the notion of the subaltern has varying levels of relevance. If the authors of these texts are categorized as subaltern, this does not automatically mean that the texts and their concerns are to be viewed as "subaltern." To define the term "Subaltern" as meaning "any marginal group" (a knee-jerk categorization at best), and thereby to define *any* text produced by a member of such a group as subaltern, is to generalize, to "fetishize national origin" (Spivak, "How to read a 'culturally different' book" 143). The term "Subaltern" becomes a theoretical dinosaur in danger of being crushed under its own weight. It includes everything but defines nothing.[7]

There is, finally, one more problem created by the word "subaltern" which I would like to look at. If we return to the differential nature of our term "subaltern" (it stands in subordinated relation to some *Other*), the word not only reproduces and reinforces, as already mentioned, perceived relations of power, it also creates in its utterance "otherness," the very "exotic otherness" which we seek to avoid. Throughout

7 I think that a criticism which was offered by a listener when I delivered this paper is of some help here. The listener commented that he had the feeling that my analysis of the term "subaltern" was like peeling an onion: I kept peeling and peeling until I had nothing; until the word disappeared. Exactly! If the Subaltern is defined simply as "any marginal group," the term rapidly loses any usefulness. It expands to cover more and more area until the word finally goes "poof," leaving behind a wisp of smoke. The criticism was then voiced that, faced with this sudden absence, so to speak, and for lack of anywhere to go from there, I turned to Canadian literature. On the contrary: my turn to a variety of different literary texts is deliberate, in order that I might substantiate my claim that an across-the-board application of the term, if it is defined as "any marginal group," leads one down the primrose path into a dead-end.

this paper, the conditions of the word "subaltern" have forced me to refer repeatedly to the "Other;" it is inevitable. To speak of the subaltern is already to acknowledge "otherness," because subalternity is the state of an individual or group relative to an Other. This is interesting in the context of Canadian multiculturalism and the immigrant text. I would like to use here the case of Abdur-Rahman Slade Hopkinson, a Guyanese poet/actor who emigrated to Canada in 1977. In his daughter's words, Slade "always resisted being exoticised," a resistance which played itself out in the area of grant applications. Whenever he applied to the Canada Council for grants to do poetry readings or for projects, the Council showed a preference for works by him written in Creole instead of Standard English, a fact which displeased Slade.

Now, what is at work here? At first glance, one might be led to conclude that there is nothing more than benevolent multiculturalism at work here, a desire to let as many different voices as possible be heard, thereby erasing notions of otherness; and perhaps that is the intention behind this. But it seems to me that, at the same time, notions of otherness in the immigrant text are being subtly enforced. Slade wrote primarily about the West Indies, and in Standard English. The Canada Council's preference suggests, however, that this is not multicultural/exotic enough, whereas a poem written in Creole about the same thing is. In this case, multiculturalism's agenda of allowing differences and fostering respect for these differences becomes a mere foregrounding of these differences, a creation of the "exotic otherness" implicit in the term "subaltern," serving at the same time as a signpost for multiculturalism. The poet on stage runs the risk of being seen as merely a quaint folk figure that the listener can't understand but finds exotic. And as Gordon Collier pointed out, what happens to those immigrant writers applying for grants who have native languages such as Urdu or Gujarati and who do not have any English variant language such as Creole in which to write? Are the chances of their receiving a grant reduced by this very fact? It seems that we end up with what Susan Korah calls a "song-and-dance" sort of multiculturalism (7).

I have attempted here to take a closer look at the term "subaltern" and to consider the significance of the fact that its definition is by nature differential. The use of the term itself is attended with difficulties, as are the question "Can 'the Subaltern' be Read?" and the connected notion of policies of multiculturalism. It is clear to me that subaltern studies are necessary and that programs of multiculturalism can be a well-meaning if imperfect attempt to somehow level the playing field. I am not at all suggesting they be abandoned simply because of their imperfections; and terminology such as "subaltern" is the clumsy and inaccurate tool with which we are forced to work. But, at the same time, it is absolutely necessary to examine such terminology and ideas at their roots, to watch our language closely, and to consider the fine consequential nuances of our positions. It is perhaps worth repeating a point which Spivak makes: "[i]t is the disenfranchised who teaches us most often by saying: I do not recognize myself in the object of your benevolence. I do not recognize my share in your naming" (*Outside* 137). If we are not aware of these very points, we will produce precisely those "eurocentric generalizations" we hope to debunk and avoid.

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Retrospective Resistance: Homi Bhabha's Mimicry[1]

MARK STEIN

> [H]istory is *happening* – within the pages of theory [...]
>
> Homi Bhabha

> There are said to be certain postcolonial critics whose analytic practices enable them to see the whole history of colonialism in a single episode.
>
> Anon.

> Like feminism, post-colonial critique has usually been a theory of engagement, concerned with *creating agency for the marginalized* and oppressed, with recovering lost histories and voices, and with opening up the academy to the world.
>
> Diana Brydon

Diana Brydon here nicely sums up the *claim* to engagement which characterizes much postcolonial criticism. Postcolonial critique is seen not merely as "a theory of engagement" but as concerned with "creating agency" which seems indicative of a *praxis* of engagement. I would like to question the terms of this engagement, and, more importantly, interrogate the objective of this enterprise of "creating agency for the marginalized" (Brydon 282). What sort of agency is this, that socially privileged groups of Western-style intellectuals allegedly create for the unnamed, the unspecified disenfranchised of our globe? What is being offered to those who enter our texts collectively by virtue of their ostensibly shared marginality, subalternity, "Third worldness", or postcoloniality? And what is this agency to those who might not even know that they have been so endowed, an agency which sometimes even comes posthumously?

Homi Bhabha's artful attention to colonial discourse and questions of identity has led to vital insights for colonial discourse analysis and cultural studies. Here a comment on aspects of the work of one very influential and controversial practitioner is offered. This is to imply neither that the discourses uttered in the name of "postcolonialism" are marked by homogeneity nor that Bhabha's work could be considered as pars pro toto of the entire field. The assumption is rather that the style and direction of his work has become a key paradigm for a field that to this day has no precise definition.

When reading Bhabha's essays – which is what the pieces collected in *The Location of Culture* remain – one is often baffled by their elusiveness, their shifty moves, their eccentric mutations. This bafflement sometimes triggers the question

1 My debts in writing this are numerous and acknowledged in the notes below; however, I want to mention specifically the 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft Postcolonial Theory" at Frankfurt whose members' sustained support and criticism remains crucial, including that of members itinerant in London or Greifswald.

whether one is dealing with a non-fictional, "serious" piece. Are we confronted with a master of (post)colonial discourse analysis, well-versed in post-structuralist lingo and psychoanalytic jargon, a shrewd practitioner of capital-T-Theory, or is Bhabha instead claiming poetic licence, bent on the suggestive phrase, the oxymoronic maxim, an advocate of the readerly text simply uninterested in water-tight hypotheses? Does his theory constitute a subversive imitation of Theory, bearing an uncanny resemblance to its poststructuralist and psychoanalytical pre-texts? No, the temporal metaphor won't do if only because Bhabha is certainly not limited to anterior texts – he commands a dazzling entourage of writing invoking his name.

Robert Young, in his chapter "The Ambivalence of Bhabha," comes to a very positive estimation of Bhabha, yet also demands the following: "Could his eclectic use of theory itself be an example of colonial mockery? A teasing mimicry of certain Western theorists and discourses that is like, but not quite?" (*White* 155). Bhabha himself admits (with reference to "DissemiNation"):

> In the narrative graftings of my chapter I have attempted no general theory, only a certain productive tension of the perplexity of language in various locations of living. (170)[2]

If we have renounced the notion of *grand narratives*, then a teller of tales, of *petits récits*, should be quite acceptable instead of a general theory. But is Bhabha that? He who speaks with little differentiation of colonials and postcolonials, *the* postcolonial condition, *the* postcolonial space – even of *postcoloniality*.[3] What strange animal is denoted by the latter term? And is its habitat the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, India, Britain, and America? *The Location of Culture* does not seek to mask the fact that it mainly focuses on the colonial experience of India while barely mentioning the African or Caribbean colonial experiences, a tendency not rare in "postcolonial theory."

One way of accounting for this is to speculate that the extensive British rule in India involving interaction between a class of mediators and British administrators, an aspect on which Bhabha has done important work, lends itself more readily to his understanding of *the* colonial situation as one of "negotiation" (think of the British adaptation of existing gubernatorial and bureaucratic systems and cultural institutions) than would the experiences of settler colonialism involving slavery and genocide. Young has suggested, however, that "today India quite clearly retains that position of pride of place, the jewel in the crown of colonial-discourse analysis" (*Colonial* 166).

In the light of most distinct colonial experiences among territories with colonial histories such a limitation to one territory would seem acute. However, and despite the

2 References are to those versions of Bhabha's essays reprinted in *The Location of Culture*, unless otherwise specified.

3 As Ania Loomba has observed pointedly, "[d]espite Bhabha's hybridity thesis, the colonial subject in his work is remarkably free of gender, class, caste or other distinctions" (182). In an early version of "The Other Question," Bhabha was more cautious in that a footnote acknowledging the inattention to sexual difference ("the body in this text is male") is included; moreover "the representation of class difference [...] is not specified adequately" (*Screen* 1983, 18, n. 1). The essay, like his other work, has been altered and reprinted under various headings. The extended footnote from which is cited here is omitted in *The Location of Culture*.

limitation of the material considered, Bhabha's conclusions drawn from his highly specific examples are raised to the lofty heights of colonial discourse and its armoury where they seem to need differentiation no more. On this level, the Indian experience is apparently transcended, specificity is dispensable, as we are confronted with heedless enumerations. It is *the* colonialist discourse which "contemplates its discriminated subjects: the *inscrutability* of the Chinese, the *unspeakable* rites of the Indians, the *indescribable* habits of the Hottentots" (Location 112). Such a scenario is "played out in the wild and wordless wastes of colonial India, Africa, the Caribbean" (Location 107).[4] The alleged, at least implied non-differentiation of "colonial discourse" is mirrored and matched, if not surpassed, in the attempted analysis. The umpire of Empire appears disdainful of discrete geographies, time spans and specific cultural frameworks.

The passage from "DissemiNation" quoted previously continues with a confession:

> I have taken the measure of Fanon's occult instability and Kristeva's parallel times into the "incommensurable narrative" of Benjamin's storyteller to suggest no salvation, but a strange cultural survival of the people. For it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity. (170)

This passage reveals a "narrator" enamoured of his own pose – the pose of a blender of distinct theories, concocting potions with "a measure of Fanon," a dash of Kristeva, a sprinkling of Benjamin. It is he who is capable, by virtue of a privileged position on the *borderlines*,[5] to speak of *the* people, to *translate differences*, to forge a *solidarity*

4 In *Colonial Desire*, Young has warned, however, that those "who today emphasize its geographical and historical differences may in effect be only repeating uncritically colonialism's own partitioning strategies" (165). While this danger is conceded, and while it is true that some of the value of the notion of the "postcolonial" lies precisely in its ability to generalize across time-spans, histories and cultures, I would still not advocate dispensing with specificity at large. We do disservice to the notion of the "postcolonial" in disallowing diversity within the terrain it covers. In my view, the "postcolonial" is most productive when accounting for both, internal differences (along the lines of gender, class, ethnicity, time, culture and location) while synthesizing exactly those aspects that were shared or need to be seen in mutual context (cf. also Mackenthun).

5 The notion of such a position as privileged runs through not only Bhabha, but also Said's and Spivak's texts. It is a notion that makes sense not only in the light of their theoretical convictions, but also in the light of the privileged positions they have achieved. However, it's unbearable to conflate jet-set hybridity and academic cosmopolitanism with the hardship of expatriates, exiles, undocumented migrants, displaced persons, and refugees, who make their way to the Northern metropoles.

Note that Said cautions:

> And while it would be the rankest Panglossian dishonesty to say that the bravura performances of the intellectual exile and the miseries of the displaced person or refugee are the same, it is possible, I think, to regard the intellectual as first distilling then articulating the predicaments that disfigure modernity – mass deportation, imprisonment, population transfer, collective dispossession, and force immigrations." (Said 403)

between *them*. It is in the concept of such *interventions* by the postcolonial critic that I am interested in this paper.

In Young's recent gloss, for "Bhabha, hybridity becomes the moment in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other, enabling the critic to trace complex movements of disarming alterity in the colonial text" (*Colonial* 22). In my understanding, however, Bhabha is not satisfied with the mere tracing of alterity but has a grander role in mind for the postcolonial critic.

Let us consider "Signs Taken for Wonder," Bhabha's treatment of the "discovery of the English book" (the Bible) and the question, how authority is asserted under circumstances of colonisation. The essay draws on an episode under a tree outside Delhi in the first week of May 1817, recorded in *The Missionary Register*. A group of people are gathered reading translated copies of the Bible shared out a few years earlier. We are witnessing, through Bhabha, the Gospel "doing its own work"–but not quite. For as Bhabha explicates, these "natives" were very clever fellows indeed! They pose "native questions [which] quite literally turn the origin of the book into an enigma" (116). They refuse to take the sacrament and consider to be baptized "perhaps the next year." Their reluctance is due to the assumption that God can hardly be expected to disseminate his word through the mouths of (English) meat-eaters. And that the "good book" is either a gift of the Europeans or the word of God, but hardly both. "By taking their stand on the grounds of dietary law," Bhabha explains convincingly, "the natives resist the miraculous equivalence of God and the English" (117f). Of course the rejection of the sacrament, the postponement of baptism are indicative of a measure of subversion. It reveals that Christianisation did not produce an undivided following, hardly a new insight though. Bhabha is not, however, concerned with showing that this subversive potential was there, but rather how and why it worked. There were certainly more effective means of resistance devised in British India than the reading and questioning of the authority of the Bible, yet Bhabha's concern with the discursive conditions of resistance to colonial presence and colonial authority makes him select such an example.

The implication is clearly that the position of the coloniser was inherently unstable in that it undermined itself in the process of iteratively establishing itself. This conveys Bhabha's fondness of discursive instabilities in forms of colonial discourse as opposed to forms of anti-colonialist discourses[6] and forms of material resistance. In the words of Young, Bhabha is less concerned with instances of resistance than with showing "the hesitancies and irresolution of what is being resisted" (*White* 145).[7] This

6 In his early work, Bhabha stresses that "the practices and discourses of revolutionary struggle" are not "the under/other side of 'colonial discourse.'" He adds that "Anti-colonialist discourse requires an alternative set of questions, techniques and strategies in order to construct it" ("Difference", 1983, 198). This assessment is absent in the 1983 and subsequent versions of "The Other Question."

7 Young's chapter is an account of the development of Bhabha's thinking via the concepts of fetishism, mimicry, hybridisation and paranoia as they drop in and out of Bhabha's essays. Although criticising "the absence of any articulation of the relation between [these concepts]" as well as "the possibility of a general theory of colonial discourse, which Bhabha's analyses imply" (146, 151), Young ultimately condones his work. He appreciates his work as the attempt of writing a form of New History that "can shift control away from the dominant Western paradigm of historicist

belies disregard on Bhabha's part for actual resistance which is relegated to the realm of the discursive where it is apparently performed by discursive conditions rather than as conscious and calculated acts.

According to Bhabha, "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its *appearance* as original and authoritative and its *articulation* as repetition and difference" (Bhabha 107, emphasis added). The ambivalence resides in a tension between the semblance of an *original* and the method of effecting this semblance, a method disclosing its objective as an *effect*, a process rather than an origin. "The English book," sign of colonial presence, appears *original and authoritative* but it achieves this status only through the strategies of *repetition and difference* which subvert the intended status. This is what Bhabha calls "a disjunction produced within the act of enunciation" – it is an irreducible split which needs to be attended to with further *repetition*, re-creating the semblance of an origin while further *betraying* (disappointing *and* disclosing) this very objective.

If *colonialist authority* is exercised via the production of differentiations and "identity effects" in the subject populations, with the colonialist body abroad claiming the right to be representative for the colonized group as a whole but "the right of representation [being] based on its radical difference" (Bhabha 111), then knowledge of the subject populations' *difference* is disavowed in order to be representative, yet it is repeated – and repeats itself – creating "something *different* – a mutation, a hybrid." However, "hybridity is the sign of the *productivity* of colonial power" (Bhabha 112, my emphasis) which ties that concept to the earlier one of "ambivalence."[8] Both are also related structurally in that they enable "a form of subversion" (Bhabha 112): the very ground for or source of authority is unstable, ambivalent and thus lends itself to intervention, to resistance. Resistance, then, becomes something of an inbuilt possibility; crucially, it is relegated to the realm of the discursive. (Bhabha does not deny *material* forms of resistance, yet he seeks to explain such phenomena discursively.) Let us investigate further, what Bhabha has to say about resistance.

It is claimed that "[r]esistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention," but rather "the effect of an ambivalence" (110). The implication here is, that resistance is not ultimately a conscious and intentional act: it is perceived as a *discursive effect* brought about under and, significantly: *by* certain discursive conditions. Although conceding that this "mode of discursive disturbance is a sharp practice" (119), Bhabha lays down that the "space of the adversarial [...] is never entirely on the outside" (109). Discursive disturbance reeks of jamming transmitters, of half-hearted co-operation, of resistance having its terms dictated by the opponent, as opposed to autonomous concepts of independence. If subversion is sanctioned by discursive conditions, "founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention" (112), then the use of subversive strategies to resist colonial authority is something like a competitive event *within* certain rules, contained within a certain arena. *Containment*, as used by the New

narrative, temporality, and univocality," and as a result can be "almost unrecognizable as history" (*White* 156).

8 For the concept of *mimicry* cf. "Of Mimicry and Men" (1987); for the concept of *ambivalence* cf. "Sly Civility" (1985) and "The Other Question" (1983).

Historicist Stephen Greenblatt, is then not merely perceived as a threat but as a fate inevitable.

Bhabha stresses that the instances of resistance he describes are not of an antagonistic but of an *agonistic* kind, an expression "pertaining to the athletic contests of ancient Greece" (*OED*). This has recently prompted Benita Parry to ask whether Bhabha was "positing colonialism as a competition of peers rather than a hostile struggle between the subjugated and the oppressor?" (Parry, "Signs" 13).[9] While Parry is interested in what differentiates the adversaries' positions, Bhabha stresses that which they mutually share. The former focus lies with what fuels the struggle, the latter with what enables it.

As a rhetorical term, *agonistic* denotes "[p]olemic, combative, striving to overcome in argument" while *agon* refers to a "verbal contest or dispute between two characters in a Greek play" (*OED*). It is these literary and rhetorical implications of the terminology which seem apropos Bhabha's project where the name *antagonist* (related by its etymology to "agent") is discarded for one related to athletic games. Both, the polemic argument or the dispute in a play, seem to me implicative of a language-based, ritualistic, rule-governed and limited exchange. This accords with Parry's claim that Bhabha attempts to use the "language model" as opposed to historical analyses to explain the phenomena of colonialism ("Signs" 9).

This leads to two further points: First, Bhabha's interest lies not so much with the "natives' questions" than with "native questions" – where the posers of these questions are subsumed under their rhetorical interventions.[10] In Bhabha's preferred form, the

9 Bhabha's essays collected in *The Location of Culture* have been in circulation and under revision for a long period. Benita Parry's extended analysis cites a number of articles that dealt with individual essays from Bhabha's œuvre. Her overall estimation is that although Bhabha's work has opened new forms of critique, his analyses are regularly flawed by abiding by the "language model" prominent in cultural and literary studies; she sees him prone to "subsuming the social to textual representation" and thereby representing "colonialism as transactional rather than conflictual" (Parry, "Signs" 12). Compared to her much-cited "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse" (1987), her assessment of Bhabha seems harsher now.

Iain Chambers' short rejoinder to Parry's present review was carried in the same magazine; he supports Bhabha's case for language as a prime arena of struggle:

> For language understood as terrestrial articulation and agency does not merely signify reality. There is no exterior location from where we can inject agency and master language; we are cast in it. It is the performative possibility of changing language, the praxis, that surely, as artists, critics, teachers... historical beings, sustains our wager to transform the world we inhabit, and it is from whence we draw our ethical and aesthetical sustenance. [...] Language is the constitutive matrix that sustains and frames us. (Chambers 110)

10 The unfortunate term "native" is curiously prominent in postcolonial criticism. Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Benita Parry use it, for example. The *OED* suggests several definitions, e.g. "one born in a place" as opposed to someone who migrated there, which can be used disparagingly. A further definition points to "original or usual inhabitants of a country as distinguished from strangers or foreigners" and adds that this term is especially used of "one belonging to a non-European race in a country in which Europeans hold political power."

Clearly, then, not only the reference to the metaphor *race* is inscribed in the term according to the second sense, but also that of *usual* or *original* populations, a notion which is hardly applicable in this age of migration which throws into relief exactly such concepts. Why then insist on a term that apparently ignores this situation?

noun-turned-adjective serves to modulate the noun "question," but no longer do we have an indication of the question's source. The chosen form concentrates on the linguistic function of the interrogative formulation, and in effectively obliterating the agent, it is silent on the question of agency. Secondly we notice that the "Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi" raised by the appearance of the Bible involves *readers*. The readers of the Bible cited by Bhabha are in turn read by him through their utterances. What is gained is a super-reading for our consumption: "Such a reading of the hybridity of colonial authority profoundly unsettles the demand that figures at the centre of the originary myth of colonialist power" (115). Whose reading profoundly unsettles this demand? Is this a reference to the reading agent responsible for "native questions" or to the reading of these questions by the postcolonial critic?

> Read as a masque of mimicry, Anund Messeh's tale emerges as a *question* of colonial authority, an agonistic space. To the extent to which discourse is a form of defensive warfare, mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance [...] Then we may not only read between the lines but even seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain. (Bhabha, "Signs" 121)

Here it becomes clearer who is doing the reading.[11] If read in a certain way, then Messeh's tale *emerges as an agonistic space*. This is certainly accurate since a less observant reader than Bhabha might have failed to read between the lines, might have failed to ensure the emergence of the *agonistic space*. Yet does this not seem to imply that Anund Messeh's tale did not, as such, question colonial authority? His *act* of

Parry's critique of "Spivak's deliberated deafness to the native voice where it is to be heard [...]" ("Problems" 39) has been rebutted by Spivak with the remark that "Ms. Parry overlooks, that we are natives too" ("Theory" 172). This stricture disallows criticism of Spivak and the likes who are conceived as per definition undivided from the group for/about whom they speak. This is a case where the term "native" is used to draw an arbitrary line between expatriate critics such as Bhabha, Spivak and JanMohamed and the expatriate South African Parry. This move, all the more pernicious in that it has been reprinted (*Outside* 60), and unameliorated by the offensive term's insulation in quotation marks, is hazardous in that it attempts to silence an allied critic by alienating her on essentialist grounds.

This lengthy footnote, a mere side-line to this paper, is included in that the workshop from which the papers collected here emerged focused on "The Role of the Critic." My point is that no postcolonial critic can easily claim to represent qua genealogy the group she or he may choose to speak for/about; such a speaking position is always also affected by gender and class differentials, geographical location and professional position, to name but a few.

For an important piece on the question "where and how is authority derived to speak on behalf of those so silenced?" cf. Kenneth Parker's recent "Very Like a Whale. Post-colonialism Between Canonicities and Ethnicities" (156).

11 A similar case is the following: With reference to the formation of the Ego ideal in a process of double identification in the ethics of service and a "collateral identification" with a leader persona entailing, in Freudian analysis, a moment of anxiety upon the threat of the expiration of that figure, Homi Bhabha, when asked for clarification, explained "I have tried to endow an agency to that moment" ("Anxious" 36).

resistance is retrospectively marked as "civil disobedience" and fossilized as a "sign" of resistance. Finally, only by reading Messeh's tale in accordance with Bhabha, a *change* of reality can be sought after. Messeh's tale is depicted as impotent, failing to change the coercive reality against which it was lodged. It takes the liberation of this sign of resistance by a contemporary critic to produce an effective act of intervention. Such a discursive intervention (in 1983) seems rather belated. It is in keeping though with the notion of an *agonistic space* that not the perspectives of the participants count, but that of the contemporary analyst. For him "it is possible to see, with historical hindsight, what they resisted" (118) – but did *they* not see what they resisted?[12]

Bhabha's readings – that want to avoid "[s]uch theoreticist anarchism [which] cannot intervene in the agonistic space of authority" (110) and are thus ostensibly committed to intervention and change – reserve these categories to today's super-reader, whereas *material resistance* is relegated to the realm of signs, to the status of a discursive *effect* in which the characters he considers are merely instrumental. Bhabha's retrospective resistance, however, is marked and marred by its belatedness; it betrays the activist *suivant*-la-lettre. Maybe his own subversive textualism, mimicking Theory, the constant divestiture of his own monologic supremacy which was remarked on initially, comes to his rescue in that it counters his own rhetoric and places the onus on the reader to decide how far to follow.

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Critics (Lost) in Space: Postmodern Subjectivities, Postcolonial Literatures and Religion

UWE SCHÄFER

Modernism and the Disappearance of Alterity

The production and reception of literature has always been shaped by the political, social and economic conditions of its time. Jacques Derrida has pointed out that the written word is the foundation for communication in Western Societies (1978, 1982). Friedrich Kittler (1985, 1986) and Klaus Theweleit (1989, 1992) have explained how the invention of new communication technologies have affected and extended this fundamental knowledge to the field of literature.

We are currently witnessing a profound change in the quality of this process (Virilio 1993). The significance of media and digital communication technologies for the construction of individual and collective subjectivities has increased, and one can hardly deny that the increased commodification of literary texts which these technologies support also affects their production and reception.

A historically significant part of the Western cultural industry, but also of the nation-state and its educational institutions, is the role-model of the literary critic. Historically, its subjectivity originates in the formation of the bourgeois individual, from the necessity to mediate between what was conceived of as the Self, the citoyen, and its Other(s), the work(s) of art. Given the expansion of teletechnologies and global communication networks, however, these subjectivities (the nation-state as well as the literary critic) see themselves under pressure. In academia this has been advanced by establishing postmodern and postcolonial discourses as an object of study. Both discourses foreground the inadequacy of the primary operating table or slate of enlightenment reason, the said distinction between Self and Other, as a role-model for the construction of identities in an age of (increasing) global mass migration. But while postcolonial discourses insist on cultural difference as a source of creativity, modernism tends to negate differences by subsuming them under the umbrella term of the global market. In the language of capitalism, literature, like every other cultural "product," may become an object of commodification. I hold that the (low-) intensified war against difference and alterity we are witnessing now leads to reinforced alienation with probably fatal consequences for the greater part of humanity. The alienation process initiated by the Western metropolitan centre may soon turn against itself. Jean Baudrillard has pointed out that

> the most efficient strategy to lose someone is to remove everything that threatens him; this is the strategy we are currently applying to ourselves. By erasing the Other in all its manifestations (disease, death, negativity, violence, otherness), to say nothing of differences of race and language, we are about to erase ourselves. (Baudrillard 172)

In my view, this is an adequate description of the processes we are currently involved in. All forms of race, class and gender differences are involved in a permanent struggle against their commodification. In academic discourse this implies struggling against being subsumed under universalist discourse (e.g. in structural analysis) or against being silenced and excluded.

In view of these developments postcolonial discourses provide chances for new anti-hegemonic identities for the literary critic who chooses to insist on radical alterity in the age of commodification. For the traditional critic, postcolonial discourse mirrors that part of the identity crisis of Western academia caused by the arrival of postcolonial critics and the confrontation of the humanist subject (and body) with a potentially infinite number of radical othernesses within hybrid contexts. Thus the traditional role-model of the literary critic seems to disappear from the one-dimensional, predictable, static common ground of utopian progress, on which it was founded, into the void(s) of multidimensional, unpredictable processes of permanently changing subjectivities. This location, however, seems to open horizons for individual and collective creativity.

On the other hand, an uncritical celebration of hybridity may prove "so macrological that it cannot account for the micrological texture of power," as Spivak (74) warns. Therefore, this rather broad statement has to be substantiated in the respective local context.

Postcolonial Literatures: Hope in the Age of Cynical Reason?

Postmodernism has criticized capitalist societies from within and has certainly earned the merit to criticize the teleology of modern thought and its messianic belief in progress. In literature this is reflected in the development of narrative techniques that have disposed of the traditional plot as we know it. Nevertheless, there are branches of postmodernism which have lost their critical impetus, probably as a consequence of their adaptation and misrepresentation by capitalist production. The dangers of the current situation lie in nihilistic relativism – celebrating difference for the market's and universal harmony's sake. This may be inferred from the increasing "multiculturalism" of its advertising industry, the primary means of ideology production in Western(ized) societies today. Coming together in Marlboro Country, Uniting under the Colors of Benetton while in fact subscribing to the law of shareholder values, is in my view one of the reasons for the worldwide social and ecological disasters we are witnessing now.

To the postmodern critique of capitalist society from "within," postcolonial literatures have added their critique from the global margins, and questioned many clear-cut distinctions of Self and Other upon which Western thought depends. One of these fundamental distinctions is the division between the secular and the sacred, which I would like to focus on in the course of this paper.

The division of secular and sacred corresponds to the division of body and mind in rationalist thought since Descartes, and it was the latter which has been privileged for most of the time. This division allowed for the idea of the control of the mind over the body and thus became the ideological basis for the process of education to which church and state subjected their subjects.

The primary technique for this subjection, the private exegesis of texts by an individual, goes back to the protestant reformation in Europe, which took place shortly after the last moorish resort in Spain was conquered, the Jews evicted from Spain, and soon afterwards the modern Empires began to establish themselves through colonial expansion.

Christianity has defined itself in relation to negative mirror-images: Islam, Judaism, and "Paganism." The prejudices against these cultures represent the founding myths of Christianity, and it is their narcissistic structure that has made them resistant to critique: the racist stereotypes that were developed against the Jewish population were easily applied to other cultures as well. Baudrillard's observations concerning the narcissism of today's Western culture support the thesis that the Christian missionary spirit has not ceased to be the driving force in capitalism.

The main effect of the Protestant Reformation in the study of texts, however, was its renewal of biblical exegesis. It secured the privilege of the faith of the individual believer over the unified body of pious believers in the Catholic church. It also privileged the Bible and the act of reading over listening. The Diet of Worms established the principal dogma that "the Bible is not only its own witness through the Holy Spirit but also its own interpreter, proving, judging, illuminating itself" (Evans 52). The road to salvation for Protestants from then on was the private study of the Bible, and *interpretation the exercise of personal judgement in private study.* Individualism through interpretation, as taught by Protestantism became the ideology for covering the new systems of exploitation established by the emerging merchant classes. By assigning wealth to individual merit, it was possible to distract attention from the systems of slavery and exploitation that in fact produced the enormous riches of the West during that time. Therefore it is hardly surprising that Protestantism was especially successful in Holland, which was the first European nation to establish a system of plantation slavery. Although Portugal and Spain plundered their colonies, they did not invent the system of plantation slavery: it was the Protestant nations, the Dutch and the English, who adopted this system later on, especially in the Caribbean. Interpretation, on the one hand, was a consolation for any bad conscience that might have befallen the individual merchant:

> The interpretative imperative became probably the first explicatory technique *and* regulatory mechanism to teach the European merchant the wealth of his soul and the rewards of his vocation. (Lambropoulos 83)

On the other hand, the invention of the aesthetic enabled the Protestants to transfer any desire for social justice to the sphere of utopia:

> The aesthetic state, in short, is the utopian bourgeois public sphere of liberty, equality and democracy, within which everyone is a free citizen [...] Taste, with its autonomy, universality, equality and fellow-feeling, is a whole alternative politics, suspending social hierarchy and reconstituting relations betweeen individuals in the image of disinterested fraternity. (Eagleton 111)

Combined, these patterns gave a cleverly thought-out justification for the exploitation of humans on the newly established plantations, especially in the Caribbean (but also on the home front). The slavery system, from which all European nations benefitted to

various degrees,[1] could be displaced to the will of God, carried out by the individual (merchant). In the protestant cognition, critique is not the insistance on difference, but criticism that no longer aspires to intervene or interact, criticism that is purified of interests. It becomes itself aesthetic, and hence superior to creativity.

Another effect that the private study of texts has is the practise of individual control of the mind over the body, i.e. desire. Michel Foucault has pointed out that

> detailed techniques were elaborated for use in seminaries and monasteries, techniques of discursive rendition of daily life of self-examination, confession, direction of conscience and regulation of the relationship between director and directed. (Foucault, "Power" 200)

In the third volume of his *The History of Sexuality* he describes the historical process that leads to the development of an art of existence dominated by self-preoccupation and concludes that the moral systems that defined the modalities of the the relation to self were

> a characterization of the ethical substance based on finitude, the Fall, and evil; a mode of subjection in the form of obedience to a general law that is at the same time the will of a personal god; a type of work on oneself that implies a decipherment of the soul and a purificatory hermeneutics of the desires; and a mode of ethical fulfilment that tends toward self-renunciation. (Foucault, "Care", Vol.3 / 239f)

Hence, the hegemonic practice of taking care of the self by controlling its imaginary others becomes a justification for slavery and exploitation: by controlling the imaginary other, the protestant self fulfils the will of God, not his own economic interests ...

One very influential tradition in protestantism that has affected modern societies is the idealism that leads from Kant to Schopenhauer and may be comprised under the heading *nihilism.* Schopenhauer believed that the categories given to every individual might be reduced to one category, which he called "Satz des Grundes." In Schopenhauer's view, the world – even space and time consists exclusively in the imagination of the single individual. What we perceive as an ordered world, is in its last consequence only the blind pushing forward (*Ins-dasein-drängen*) and self-annihilation (*Sich-vernichten*) of what he calls images of primeval will (*Gestalten des Urwillen*). The way to salvation, for Schopenhauer, is the radical reduction and exclusion of the will to being-there (*Wille zum Dasein*). This romanticising of death had a profound influence on Wagner, Nietzsche, Freud, certainly also on Baudrillard, and on Samuel Beckett, as I will try to point out below.

1 Germany, which did not openly colonize until the nineteenth century, did nevertheless own the biggest sugar-refining centre in Europe in the first half of the eighteenth century (in Hamburg), and it supplied manufactures to Scandinavia, Holland, England, France, and Portugal for resale in Africa (Rodney 86).

Wilson Harris's *Jonestown*: Writing Back to Beckett's Nihilism

To illustrate and investigate the methodological claims made above, I will now present a comparative reading of Wilson Harris's text *Jonestown* and its predecessor, Samuel Beckett's *Imagination Dead Imagine*.

I have described aesthetics as one form of the protestant rite of communion with God. Because of its restriction to the text and its metaphysical foundation bourgeois aesthetics is perhaps the most problematic concept of art from a postcolonial perspective. Especially the commodification of works of art by insisting on their autonomy runs the risk of making postcolonial products only dear to the metropolitan cultural industry. In most of its media the characteristic discourse on art emphasizes its concern with "universal human values" and their detachment from economic, social and political contexts. This detachment is often regarded as the standard against which works of art, and thus also the literatures from non-European contexts, are measured, taxed and evaluated.

One of the first writers to propose an aesthetics which fundamentally challenges the Western realist tradition as the only valid conception of ordering reality is Wilson Harris. He challenges the view that Western forms of narrative, especially those underlying the nineteenth-century realist novel, one of the main carriers of imperialist ideology, represent an appropriate form for the traumas of West Indian societies. He proposes and practises an aesthetic model that avoids the metaphysical and universalist biases of the realist novel. Harris uses a system of syncretic writing that includes a wide variety of textual strategies and epistemological concepts which foreground the possibilities of the individual imagination as a step towards "third (fourth, fifth, ...) spaces" beyond the discourse of dominance and subservience. His writing relies on the recovery and transformation by the collective memory of colonized societies, which he believes displays itself in archetypal myths and subjects that may be found all over the world and throughout the histories of humanity.

The sources of his writing may be traced back to Amerindian and Greek traditions, but also to quantum physics, to architecture and music, whose pre-modern foundations and patterns he unveils and uses as a creative force.

Consequently, his works are a treasure house of various strategies of resistance against the realist narrative. One may find the reversion to vernacular languages, the integration of local landscapes and events or the abrogation and appropriation of the narrative strategies that serve the (neo-)colonial centre. But as mentioned before, Harris is not just critical of realism. He also states that the ahistorical basis of modern nihilism bears the danger of losing contact with traditions as creative forces.

The closure produced by nihilism has been transformed into literary texts by the Irish writer Samuel Beckett, who, like Harris, chose the diaspora as his homeland. Beckett is also extremely critical of and sensitive to the colonial impetus of realist writing. The "characters" of his late prose are constantly carrying out the protestant ritual of communion with god, the private search for the self. Their search, however, is always completely in vain. They find themselves trapped in an endless cycle of regression; a grim mockery of the rite of interpretation, and a radical critique of private exegesis. Like Harris's, Beckett's characters are struggling to overcome the traumas of protestantism, but they fail because it is impossible for them to transcend their nihilist universe.

In *Jonestown*, Harris starts with an attack on nihilism by adopting the title of one of Samuel Beckett's short prose pieces called *Imagination Dead Imagine* and relating Beckett's arid landscapes to human creativity. In my analysis, I will try to show how Harris re-writes some of the nihilist aspects of Beckett's text.

Beckett's text *Imagination Dead Imagine* displays a radical scepticism towards the foundation of art: individual imagination. Beckett has fashioned a negative attitude towards the suitability of language for communication throughout his work and has constantly challenged the belief in the existence of any metaphysical bridges between individuals, not to mention between cultures.

In contrast to Beckett, Harris is profoundly optimistic about inter-individual and cross-cultural communication. For him the key to cross-cultural creativity is the human imagination, which he regards as a means to overcome colonial and neo-colonial biases and blindnesses towards the Other and also to bridge the artificial, schizophrenic gap between scientific rationality and artistic creation that haunts Western societies.

Therefore it is hardly surprising to find Harris re-writing a piece of prose that is profoundly sceptical about the existence of the imagination. *Imagination Dead Imagine* seems to foreground the difficulties, if not the impossibility of any form of creative imagination by depicting a world of characters completely isolated from their surroundings and unable to communicate. Harris seems to have reacted to this apparently nihilistic world-view, all the more so as he does not share Beckett's scepticism about the creative powers of language. *Jonestown* may be regarded as an attempt to challenge and revise this scepticism and to re-inform it with a notion which is the primary target of nihilism: hope. By foregrounding the first two words of the title of *Imagination Dead Imagine*, Harris uses Beckett's text as a starting point to unfold a complex textual universe which re-informs Beckett's text with hope.[2]

Imagination Dead Imagine

The key note of Beckett's later fiction is the futile quest for a unified Ego. All of his major characters, from his first novel, *Murphy*, via *Molloy, Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable* to his later prose pieces, are engaged in this flight, which takes place along the lines of the method of *epoché*, the exclusion of the exterior world, which has been proposed as a tool for the experience of the transcendental Ego by Edmund Husserl. The knowledge of the Self, according to Husserl, is a fundamental fact of psychology, and may be experienced in the following manner:

> By using the phenomenological epoché I may reduce my natural ego and my inner life – the realm of my psychological self-awareness – to my

2 There is, however, a touch of strategic essentialism in such a reading of *Imagination Dead Imagine*. If one takes the second part of the title ("imagine") into account, "Imagination Dead Imagine" creates a dialectical tension between the poles "Death" and "Imagination," and in this tension actually *confirms* the possibility of the imagination by creating an endless loop of interpretation. Nihilism, in its extreme, may turn itself into hope.

> transcendentalphenomenological ego, the realm of transcendental-phenomenological self-awareness[3] (Husserl 27; my translation)

Though Beckett repeatedly denied having any knowledge of philosophy ("I never read philosophy"), his texts show an inclination towards ridiculing rationalist philosophers, amongst them Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz. His characters seem to be familiar with transcendental phenomenology, and I favour a reading of Beckett's texts which regards them as guinea-pigs in an application of *epoché*, whose vivisection unveils the inherent violence of this operation.

The fictional space of *Imagination Dead Imagine* resembles a closed space, a model of a ptolemaic universe, into which a female and a male body are crammed and exposed to gradual, rhythmic alternations of light, movement and temperature. Light and temperature change from white heat to black cold, passing a continuum of shades of gray. The narrator excises all references to the exterior world in order to arrive at a state of

> no trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good imagination dead imagine. Islands, waters, azure, verdure, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly, *omit* (*Imagination Dead Imagine* 148; my emphasis)

and constructs an abstract space, "a plain rotunda, all white in whiteness, [...] a ring as in the imagination the ring of bone" (145).

This constellation displays Western metaphysics in a nutshell: A world of extreme polarities, of binary dichotomies excluding each other; trapped, immobile bodies back to back, unable to see or recognize any other being; a binary system of Black and White, Male and Female, East and West. Though the reader is in the position to see both parts, his gaze remains voyeuristic and he may at best experience the horror of gazing at the heart of darkness of rationalism, a horror freezing him in his position. In *Imagination Dead Imagine* the binary patterns that structure Western thinking are ruthlessly exposed, the bones of its cognitive skeleton unearthed.

Yet Beckett makes no attempt to transcend this structure, to fill the bones with flesh or to bury them in the womb of the imagination in order to start all over again. Therefore, Beckett's texts and its bodies remain trapped in sterility. At best – and this does not only hold for *Imagination Dead Imagine*, but for many of his other prose pieces – there remains only one line of flight for the "I", the narrator refers to "unbelieving": pure negativity, the void, the Nothing, the "Not I." The purity of the mutually exclusive male and female space is maintained. Though pure negativity certainly has its merits in creating the dialectical tension that might give access to planes of infinite possibilities, it remains barren without any exterior references, i.e. gives little clue for an access to or the birth of other imaginative spaces; and what is more: its simple binary structure of "I – Not I" inhibits the imagination of any alternative to the *status quo*. Given this background, Beckett's prose texts repeat the fundamental dilemma of modernity: its tendency to erase a multidimensional

3 "Durch die phänomenologische epoché reduziere ich mein natürliches Ich und mein Seelenleben–das Reich meiner psychologischen Selbsterfahrung – auf mein transzendentalphänomenologisches Ich, das Reich der transzendentalphänomenologischen Selbsterfahrung."

individual and collective historical memory does not only dump the past onto the garbage-heap, but the future as well.

Jonestown

Harris has repeatedly criticized the rigid dichotomisation of subject and object as a part of the heritage of the Western realist tradition. This may sound odd given the fact that Beckett, especially in his later prose pieces, deliberately eliminates all references to the exterior signifiers traditionally employed by realism in order to search into the interior of the novel (see above: "omit"). But the few basic elements that remain are still arranged in a binary fashion: rooms (spaces), voices (sound), bodies occur as duals, in *Imagination Dead Imagine*, as white and black, male and female, heat and coldness, etc.

In contrast to *Imagination Dead Imagine*, *Jonestown* does not take place in a closed space looked upon by the gaze of an anonymous narrator, but in the quantum dream-landscapes of its main character, Francesco Bone, who, like many of his predecessors, is an archetypal character.

Harris has adopted the concept of parallel universes from quantum physics, especially from Nick Herberts' *Quantum Reality: Beyond the New Physics*. It first occurs in an epigraph to *The Four Banks of the River of Space*:

> Quantum reality consists of simultaneous possibilities, a "polyhistoric" kind of being [...] incompatible with our one-track minds. If these alternative (and parallel) universes are really real and we are barred from experiencing them only by a biological accident, perhaps we can extend our senses with a sort of "quantum microscope" (Harris, *The Radical Imagination* 55).

Harris points out that this notion comes close to his aesthetic objective of presenting the resurrected figure, the one that triumphs over death.

Harris multiplies the two bodies of Beckett's text. In *Jonestown*, they have become a heap of bodies, in the midst of which the narrator, Francesco Bone, dreams his Jacob's ladder dream of Jonestown. Between the corpses of the dead of the massacre Bone dreams a parallel Jonestown to the one the text commences in. In contrast to *Imagination Dead Imagine*, which is structured like an ensemble of binary dichotomies, a constellation of rigid mutual exclusion (which Harris usually refers to as "bias") that excludes any alternative spaces, *Jonestown* generates parallel universes, whose hidden connections are nevertheless perceived by the dreaming narrator Francesco Bone: "Me! *Me* in another universe, a parallel universe to this" (6). In his dream, Bone re-lives the violent trauma of colonized societies, the fear of the colonizer, which is personified in the cult leader Jonah Jones who is about to appear on the *Walstatt* (bonefield) at any moment. Beginning to count the bodies on the ground, Francesco Bone gets clues for his recollection of the voices of the past, the voices of the victims of colonization, "the voices of bone" (6). The remains of their bodies turn into the flute of memory.

Here Harris draws on the animist belief of the ancient Caribs and Arawaks that the bones of the deceased carry "certain qualities, somethings, spirits etc. which could be detached, separated, and transferred to the living" (Roth 158).

In an earlier text Harris has pointed out the importance of the music of the Arawak bone-flute for the creation of shared spaces and a syncretic aesthetics:

> The Caribs consumed a morsel of flesh from an enemy. Then they hollowed a bone from which they had plucked that morsel and made a flute. They sought to enter the mind of their enemy, the living, the dead, and the unborn. That flute was the seed of an intimate revelation of mental spaces they shared with the enemy. (Harris, "Adversarial Contexts" 127)

The application of this ancient technology unfolds a space of historical memory, in which the stories of the Amerindians killed during colonization, the slaves of the middle passage and on the plantations and those of other victors and victims of modernity reverberate.

As mentioned before, the space in *Imagination Dead Imagine* has a ptolemaic structure: it is stable, exactly measured, and resembles a single, flat, closed entity; the only fissure is a subtle erosion in the linear flow of repetitive events. The only element of instability is a recurrent vibration *ex nihilo*. This structure mirrors the Western common sense conception of history as a flow of repetitive events that is never profoundly shaken, only now and then revised by revolutions, i.e. slight disturbances which, on the grand scale, do not interfere much with the grand narrative: "But on the whole, experience shows, such uncertain passage is not common" (146). From Harris' perspective, Beckett misses the chance to shift perspectives, to transcend the reductionist view that underlies the Western myth of the self-sufficient individual, which Harris does in favour of split, unstable, multiple, yet related egos. Thus, *Jonestown* transforms the stable universe of *Imagination Dead Imagine* into a text that allows for an intense reading.[4]

One of the key phrases in *Imagination Dead Imagine* is: "The extremes, as long as they last, are perfectly stable" (146). The regular, constant shift in light represents the swing of the pendulum, the Western technology for measuring time since the 16th century. Very similar to its notion of history, Time in the West is conceived of as a one-dimensional, steady flow of repetitive events starting at a specific point, a structure which is maintained in *Imagination Dead Imagine*. In contrast to this particular narrative structure, Harris has developed narrative structures whose conception of time goes back to South American precolumbian cosmologies.

In many of these cosmologies it is impossible to conceive of the world independent of time. Thus notions of static space and matter, as posited in the

4 There is a striking parallel in *Jonestown* to one of the strategies of resistance described by Deleuze and Guattari. In the chapter "becoming-intense, ..." of *A Thousand Plateaus*, one may find the idea of a "plane of consistency of Nature":

> The plane of consistency of Nature is like an immense Abstract Machine, abstract yet real and individual; its pieces are the various assemblages and individuals, each of which groups together an infinity of particles entering a unity to the plane of nature, which applies equally to the inanimate and the animate, the artificial and the natural (*A Thousand Plateaus* 254).

In a comparison of the two texts, the unrelated elements of the abstract machine constructed in Beckett's text become a plane of consistency for Harris, in which these elements are related, and the gap between inanimate/animate, artificial/natural is bridged.

ptolemaic co-ordinates of sky and earth and discussed philosophically from Euclid to Newton and Kant, are alien to precolumbian societies. "Moreover, the contemporary world does not exist somehow detached from the remote and scarcely imaginable 'beginning of time,' but as one of a *series* of creations, whose beginnings and endings are the matter of prime concern" (Brotherston 148). The Quechua, Maya and Toltec cosmogonies know four world ages, of which the first two ended in a flood or a solar eclipse due to malfunctions in the sky. The subsequent two ages are theatres for struggles between terrestrial forces, which end e.g. in volcanic eruptions, but also prepare the way for the creation of man.[5]

Furthermore, the Maya calendar posits resonances between the rhythms of celestial and terrestial life millions of days forwards *and* backwards from the start of its respective age (Brotherston 149). The two most important celestial bodies for the Maya calendar are Venus and the sun, which have exact counterparts in Toltec ritual: Quetzalcoatl and Royal Lord.

It is to these two celestial bodies that Harris refers most often, from *Palace of the Peacock* to *Jonestown*. Venus/Quetzalcoatl is a prominent figure in his writing, especially as a symbol of resurrection from catastrophe and the eventual triumph over death. Venus/Quetzalcoatl appears on the Eastern as well as on the Western horizon. The Mayas believed Venus to pass through the underworld (the unconscious) at inferior conjunction, before it heralds the sun rising in the east. Therefore Venus/Quetzalcoatl was regarded as a victor over death, a symbol of resurrection and creation (Brotherston 149-150). During his journey through the underworld, he brings bones from Dead Land and makes man (Brotherston 157).

It makes sense to interpret *Jonestown* within the archetypes of this myth of creation. Venus/Quetzalcoatl connects several spheres: the Eastern and Western hemisphere, the gender divide by changing her/his gender during her/his passage of the (collective, or, in Harris' terms, universal) unconscious, and life and death by being born again and again according to the Maya calendar, and by creating man, i.e. new readings, by rewriting a bone, a text from the Western literary canon.

The bringing of bones is the starting point for *Jonestown*: "Bone is affected by a strand in the ancient Maya civilization in which the linearity of time is breached in favor of a twinning of past and futures. Such compressions in and of time would imply, I feel, gestating resources within the womb of tradition" (*Jonestown* 5).

The narrator dreams the twin connection to a celestial Jonestown, which at the same time is the underworld, the burial ground from which Quetzalcoatl brings bones ("Jonestown was above me in the skeleton of the stars" (5)). Beckett's "ring of bone" (*Imagination Dead Imagine* 145), the ptolemaic universe, becomes the quarry of a much richer tradition of parallel histories reaching forwards *and* backwards in time.

It is impossible to conceive of space independent of time in *Jonestown*. This engenders a different conception of space from the objectification common in the realist novel, namely, one that largely relies on the unconscious. History is rather conceived of as a living process. This textual desire surfaces in Harris' aesthetic aim to

5 It is useful to conceive of Harris' texts as such a series of creations. The most obvious parallel to the time-conception of American cosmologies in four ages may be found in the four banks of his 1992 text *The Four Banks of the River of Space*. Another subtle bridge arches the four books of *The Guyana Quartet*.

create "a living landscape" (Harris, "Absent Presence" 75) in his texts. He is committed to a reconstruction of space "as we know it," i.e. a space encountered as timeless, chaotic and inhomogenous, into space as a social body, a space that is permanently contested and negotiated. Harris' living landscapes challenge today's dominant neo-liberalist and neo-realist ideology, because "abstract space, the space of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism, bound up as it is with exchange (of goods and commodities, as of written and spoken words, etc.) depends on consensus more than any space before it" (Lefebvre 57).

In contrast to *Jonestown,* time in *Imagination Dead Imagine* is eliminated. Only a pendulum as an instrument for measuring time is inserted into the abstract space of his text, but it does not have any effect on the text's space-time relationships, quite the contrary: it even adds to the rigidity of the textual system.

Conclusion

Beckett and Harris may both be regarded as critics of modernity. In their writings both move inwards, but to a radically different avail: Where Beckett's characters find "the great void," Harris' characters experience the richness of a universe of shifting perspectives. This does not imply that *Jonestown* is a deliberate, chaotic assemblage of unrelated elements, which is not structured; rather, it is informed by the logic of the unconscious, which by its reversion to levels of memory deeper than the pure facts of historical discourse allows for a more complex order than the aesthetics of modernism, a plateau that simultaneously retains and carries differences.

Beckett and Harris have recognized nihilism as the great danger to modern societies and have reacted in almost complementary manner: where Beckett chooses the weapon of objectification, i.e. of irony, Harris uses that of subjectification, i.e. hope.

But while Beckett stops in his tracks at criticizing and nihilistically ridiculing Western metaphysics and constructions of the self as a self-sufficient individual in its endless search for the "beyond", Harris offers more constructive alternatives. In his re-writing, Beckett's apparently nihilistic mockery of human alienation becomes a source of creative power. Beckett's work is haunted by a violently excized historical memory negating any possibility of its existence. The problem is the reductionism that comes with Beckett's "exploded" conception of the Self. Harris does not subscribe to such a static notion of the Self, quite the contrary. Paradoxically enough, the transcendence of the self-sufficient individual can only be achieved by introspection, the path both writers take in their fiction. But where Beckett remains sceptical about the recovery of a (collective) memory and misses the Dionysian turn – the transgression of nihilism – , Harris reveals the true source of modern schizophrenia and uses it as a source of creativity and a key to memory and community.

On a broader scale, this mirrors the critique of high humanism as a fortified position of white patriarchal power being secured through aggressive domination of the natural world (which in Western culture usually signifies the female sphere). Beckett has ridiculed this position by exposing its main philosophical operation, the individual and collective excision of historical memory and the quest for the amnesiac self-sufficient ego by the exclusion of an imaginary other, as a course towards impotence, sterility and deprivation. Harris has informed his discourse with the erotics

of artistic imagination, the pleasure of the text, as a source of creativity in a time that seems to have abandoned hope.

The survival of humanity in the age of modern nihilism requires not only a "thinking-in-the-gaps." It requires the permanent imagination of new planes of creativity instead of a pointless search for the metaphysical truth. I have tried to demonstrate how postcolonial discourse may re-inform even the most despairing expressions of modern nihilism by pointing out some of the crucial elements of Wilson Harris' re-writing of Samuel Beckett's *Imagination Dead Imagine*. Beckett has shown how the (Protestant) search for the individual communion with God, the search for the Self, literally leads to nothing. Thus he earns the merit of unveiling modern individualism as the lie that it is. His radical scepticism about the possibility of communication between radically different selves is, in Wilson Harris' *Jonestown,* confronted by the profound belief – drawing on the Maya conception of time – that the radical imagination bears the chance to create and re-create arches and bridges between past, present and future his/herstories.

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The Language of the Critic: Issues and Boundaries in Postcolonial Communication

SUSANNE MÜHLEISEN

Whenever there is communication between people from different speech communities or different discourse communities, language becomes not only the medium of communication but a matter of negotiation in itself. A negotiation in more than one sense of the word: while, on the one hand, language can serve to *mediate* between the different parties, it may, on the other hand, also be a possession to *bargain* with. After all, a widely recognized (Labovian) view sees a speech community not defined by their mutual understanding on a surface level but rather by "participation in a set of shared norms" which can also be seen in the evaluative behaviour of the group. In every contact situation between different groups, language also becomes a struggle for semiotic power, for the right to set or defend one's own norms and values.

It is therefore no surprise that the most alien and unequal of all possible contact situations, the colonial encounter, features very prominently in postcolonial literature and has been described and skillfully analyzed in a number of well-known and important works (e.g. Calvet 1974, Todorov 1982, Greenblatt 1991). Greenblatt (86ff) makes some interesting points about the characteristics of this early cross-cultural communication which include that the more powerful group not only took their communicative norms for granted and, through acts of selective perception in reading the culturally different signs, always confirmed their already existing beliefs, but often did not even recognize the linguistic problems involved in this contact situation – "the moments of blankness [...] are intertwined strangely with the confident assumption that there was no significant barrier to communication" (95). Until today the colonial encounter bears important linguistic consequences for postcolonial societies and indeed for postcolonial literatures: while the language situations may be very different in character in different areas of the formerly colonized parts of the world – depending on whether or not the indigenous languages survive, whether there are indigenous writing languages, whether the colonial contact situation has led to the development of Creoles, etc. – the general pattern in the majority of societies is that the "vernacular" is used for informal, low prestige functions whereas the former colonial language is used in official and public domains and functions as the main writing language.

This is a convenient fact when it comes to our own encounters with postcolonial literature. As more or less competent readers in English we have access to most of the literature in the formerly pink part of the world without having to deal with translations from "obscure" languages. On the contrary, the original can rather be read and interpreted as the translation of some (different) culture(s). That the variety of English used in postcolonial literature is often recognizably different from the standard variety of the British Isles or the US is thus welcomed as a key to interpretation, and peculiarities of, e.g. Indian English, Zimbabwean English or, to some extent, even Caribbean Creoles or Nigerian Pidgin, are often very much appreciated as markers of

the cultural Other. While the theoretical question of the "language problem" in postcolonial literature, the "Ngugi versus Achebe debate," the question of language abrogation or appropriation (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 38 ff.) is far from answered, literary and publishing practices have come to a pragmatic conclusion, a usage and acceptance of modified differences, as long as they are intelligible to the reader who is literate in English.

There are indications that this trend towards a de-homogenization of a written standard variety may be part of a general movement towards a new orality. Audio- and audiovisual media have gained importance in the last few decades and have made people familiar with different types of Englishes all over the world. The sound of Jamaican Creole has spread through Jamaican music and has certainly promoted it more than the written word ever could have done. And even the new communication technologies make use of a new kind of amphibian oral writing, which Edward Kamau Brathwaite calls "writin in light":

> [T]echnology makes nation language *easier* [...] the global village concept, the message is the medium and all that [...] The poem was saying that the computer has made it much easier for the illiterate, the Caliban, actually to get himself visible [...] Because the computer does it all for you, you don't have to be able to type, you can make mistakes and correct them or leave them, *you can see what you hear.* When I said "writin in light," that is the main thing about it – the miracle of that electronic screen means that the spoken word can become visible in a way that it cannot become visible in the typewriter where you have to erase it physically [...] The computer has moved us away from scripture into some other dimension which is "writin in light." The typewriter is an extension of the pen. The computer is getting as close as you can to the spoken word. [highlighted in the original, S.M.] (Brathwaite in Brown 126)

In the perception of most people, however, the printed word is still the yardstick of "correctness" in language use, and writing continues to be a high prestige function. In fact, the question of which variety of language is written often sets the demarcation line to determine "what is a language, what is a dialect, what is a 'vernacular,' etc." Walter Ong, for instance, states that "often the speakers of the [minority] language are even incredulous about its writability, believing that only certain languages, not including their own, can be written" (5). Writing, and especially the printed word, makes language a "proper language" in the eyes of many and remains, if only in the perception of people, the most powerful tool to determine a wider acceptability of the variety in question. While the number of languages spoken around the world are steadily decreasing, writing has often been decisive for the survival of languages in competition with other ones, often as the result of a colonial encounter. Therefore, developments in postcolonial use of language in writing should continue to be observed for their implications as to language attitudes.

Of English-lexicon Creoles, for instance, which belong to the most stigmatized results of the colonial encounter, one can observe how they have gradually penetrated all levels of literary texts. Lexical, syntactic and (written highlighting of) phonological differences to English can nowadays be found not only in "oral" genres such as drama

or poetry or in the direct speech of prose narratives but also at the level of the narrative voice (cf. Mühleisen 1996). While questions of standardization and a single orthography are far from solved and remain a highly political and ideological issue (cf., for instance, Sebba 1994), the boundaries between Creole as the language of orality versus Standard English as the language of writing seems to have shifted at least a few inches, even though an equal footing in the use of both varieties is still miles out of sight.

The (however modest) shifting of the boundaries of orality and writing is almost exclusively restricted to creative writing, though. Most other types of internationally accessible writing and, most of all, academic writing are unaffected by such developments and do not include "postcolonial Englishes or Creoles," thus giving Standard English the almost exclusive voice of authority.[1] In some cases where an academic and a writer are united in one person, this may lead to a split writing strategy: their academic half will write in Standard English and their creative half in "global English," Creole, etc.[2] For academic writers there seems to be little awareness that there are significant barriers to communication with other discourse communities which could be reduced by modifying their language in writing. Creative writers, and especially those who are not academics have identified these communicative problems and have expressed their uneasiness about this gap between their language and the language of the critic – a feeling that results from the fact that the language used clearly indicates who is the investigator and who is the object of investigation. I would therefore like to extend the question Spivak poses as the title of her article ("How to read a 'culturally different' book") to the question "and how to speak/write about it?"

Two different points are at issue in the relationship between the language of the critic and the language of the writer: one concerns the dominance of Standard English at the expense of other languages or varieties and raises the question *which language* should be used at all in academic writing. The other one is concerned with the use of academic jargon, or *which register* can or has to be used in academic writing. In our workshop the criticism of Native Canadian writer Lee Maracle was cited who sees the lack of clarity and the use of jargon in literary criticism as a method of retaining authority and power and rejects the language of the critic as "de-humanized" and "de-personalized," a "language separate from the human experience: passion, emotion, and character." (Cf. also Sandra Carolan-Brozy's paper in this volume.)

1 This, in fact, does not only apply to the competition between Standard English and so-called vernacular languages but also between SE and well established writing languages: as I am writing this, an article in *Die Zeit* (18.7.96) discusses the decline of the German language in German scientific journals: in a field like chemistry where German had once even been a kind of *lingua franca* for Middle Eastern Europe the use of English in publications in Germany apparently increased from almost zero before World War 2 to 72 % in 1987 and has by now almost replaced German. The same seems to happen in other (not anglophone) countries where English has become the undisputed language of science.

2 In his statement for our workshop, Marc Colavincenzo cites the case of a Guyanese poet/actor living in Canada whose work written in Creole was preferred by the Canada Council over his work written in Standard English – a fact which displeased him because of the exoticism expressed in this choice. This is a good example for this gap between creative and "serious" writing: had the poet/actor written his application to the Council in Creole they might have taken it as a joke or dismissed it entirely.

And indeed, literary critics form a discourse community whose authority seems to be strongly linked to certain strategies: one is that meaning has to be constantly negotiated by means of definitions and redefinitions of relevant terms. A good example of that was the discussion in our workshop about the term "subaltern" where the many connotative shifts the term had taken on, beyond the straightforward entry in the dictionary, was the cause of some confusion. This can indeed be taken as a strategy of power: those who are "ahead" of the discourse can also in many ways control it. It may be interesting that these strategies are typically attributed to so-called antilanguages (Halliday 1978) used by low-prestige groups to create a strong group identity whose typical features are deliberate difficulty and unintelligibility to outsiders (e.g. Cockney rhyming slang, Rastafarian talk or, more generally, street talk by various groups). Hodge and Kress (1988), however, observed that "high" languages indeed have typical qualities of an antilanguage:

> they are full of complex transformations that obscure referential meanings while signifying kinds of power and solidarity, and they function to exclude those outside the high-status language community. (88)

The "lack of clarity" therefore seems to be well intended and some academic authors may even be suspected of using this occasionally as a strategy of irony. In a similar way as Bhabha (86) describes colonial mimicry as an "ironic compromise" which is "constructed around an ambivalence," the postcolonial critic can gain authority by using a kind of postcolonial mimicry (cf. also Mark Stein's paper in this volume).

Taking this criticism on the language of criticism into consideration, it may be interesting to take a look at a few recent examples of deliberate floutings of the "standard-cum-jargon" requirements of academic writing, which may well fall into the same category of academic games but may still have some important effects: on the one hand, they may evoke the same reactions of disbelief and scepticism as those of minority language speakers who see their language written down for the first time (cf. Walter Ong's example, cited above) and may thus question the apparent self-evidence by which the rules for academic writing are given. On the other hand, they explore the creative potential of languages or varieties which have hardly ever been used in these contexts. It is perhaps not surprising that all of the attempts are undertaken by trained linguists whose work deals with questions of (de)standardization and the promotion of less prestigious varieties. The first text forms part of the introduction to a dissertation dealing with the status of (post)colonial Englishes in general and Sri Lankan English in particular. While the work on the whole is written in standard academic English, a modest tribute is paid to a practical realization of the theoretical claims which are made in the book. The juxtaposition of a "concrete" to an academic abstract seems to share the criticism of a lack of clarity of the usual academic jargon:

Ex. 1: Parakrama (1995)

CONCRETE

I done shown Standard spoken English as standing up only for them smug-arse social elites. And it ain't really no different for no written English neither. The tired ways in which the standardized languages steady fucked over the users of other forms had became clear when we went and studied them (post)colonial Englishes. Them "other" Englishes came and made it impossible to buy into sacred cows like native speaker authority because there from the getgo there are only *habichole* users, not natives!

I say why is it that, say "She say I is not good people" and "She telling I no good fello, no!" are murder to the "educated" except in the ghetto of "creative" contexts, whereas something like "In the conversations that have transpired during our acquaintance, she has intimated to me personally that she cannot bring herself to consider myself to be admirably suitable with respect to my individual character" is only deemed "wordy", but clearly shows a "command" of the language? The hegemony of hep standard languages and cool registers which hide where they are coming from, by a shitload of "arbitrary" rules and "other-people-in power-require"-isms is read for points by these non-standard varieties like and unlike the ones I be mixing and jamming here.

[...]

ABSTRACT

Champions of the so-called Other [or (post)colonial] Englishes have operated on the basis of the special status of these varieties, thereby justifying the formulation of different criteria for their analysis. A careful examination of the processes of standardization as they affect these "Others" (particularly "South Asian English") strips the camouflage from standardization which can be seen as the hegemony of the "educated" elites, hence the unquestioned paradigm of the "educated standard". These standards are kept in place in "first world" contexts by a technology of reproduction which dissimulates this hegemony through the self-represented neutrality of prestige and precedent whose selectivity is a function of the politics of publication. In these "other" situations, the openly conflictual nature of the language context makes such strategies impossible. The non-standard is one of the most accessible means of "natural" resistance, and, therefore, one of the most sensitive indices of de-hegemonization.

[...]

As the author explains in a footnote, the "concrete" deliberately employs a kind of "mish-mash" of Black American English, slang and South Asian English features in order to raise questions not only of the use of a non-standard variety but also of "authenticity" and "appropriateness." While this may be effective in the sense that the reader will be startled to find such a combination in this context (which is obviously the intention of the author) there are some difficulties with this text in that the combination of non-standard varieties and slang will *only* work as a negative strategy but will not even attempt to offer any serious alternative. To combine (post)colonial varieties of English with slang is also a potentially dangerous mixture in that it puts two very different things on an equal level: slang (which is part of the stylistic range of most languages/varieties) and regional/social differences to a standard variety. It is an

uneasy choice because it seems to confirm long-held assumptions (of speakers of Standard English) that (post)colonial Englishes are inherently vulgar and cannot be employed for any other function than abuse anyway. Furthermore, the titling of the "concrete" as opposed to "abstract" plays with but also confirms another common argument used to exclude non-standard languages, indigenous languages or Creoles from academic discourse: it is often claimed that these languages do not possess the vocabulary of science, that they cannot express abstract thought, etc. While it may be debatable whether or not it is desirable to keep up the dividing lines, the use of linguistic relativity as a justification for them is clearly wrong. After all, languages *can* enlarge their vocabulary (e.g. by borrowing or semantic extension, etc.) and take on new functions which they previously did not fulfil.

The second example is taken from an unpublished conference paper where again two different versions of the same content are given. The oral presentation was given in the version in the left column, Guyanese Creole, whereas the Standard English version in the right column served as a translation.

Ex.: 2: Devonish (1994)

Kyaribiiyan Ruuts Langgwij, Nyuu Taim Sapii and Fiilinz fo Neeshan
Fo Staat Aaf

Hou piipl taak iz wan ting doz prapa mek dem fiil se dem biilaangs togeda. Huu taak laik matii doz fiil se dem iz matii. An huu doz doon taak laik dem, no dem matii. Nof taim, wan set a piipl doz mek op dem main se hou dem taak speshal. An den, dem doz staat biiliiv se a no jos di taak wa speshal bot di piipl wa taakin, to. An az fo huu no taak speshal taak, dem no speshal niida. Wel, iz so fiilinz fo langgwij doz staat. An fiilinz fo langgwij doz ton fiilinz fo neeshan. So, fo yu biilaangs to wan neeshan, nof taim di neeshan langgwij ga fo bii yu ruuts langgwij.
[...]

Caribbean Vernacular Languages, Technology and National Consciousness
Introduction

Shared speech is a very important means of creating common identity. The absence of shared speech, on the other hand, serves to exclude those who do not belong within the common identity. It is very often the case that a group of people come to regard their speech as in some way special. They then begin to transfer this feeling of specialness from their language to themselves, its speakers. As for those who are not perceived as sharing the special common speech, they come to be regarded as the very opposite of special. It is by this means that language consciousness becomes converted into national consciousness. Often, therefore, to belong to a national group, the language of that national group has to be one's native/vernacular language.
[...]

While the oral version does not pose any problems of understanding to people who have had exposure to Caribbean Creoles, the written version clearly provides a challenge even (and probably most) for native speakers in that it uses an orthography which is fairly consistently phonemic (the Cassidy orthography) but is not commonly used by, for instance, creative writers. The advantages of an orthography which was designed by linguists as an attempt to standardize Creole over an idiosyncratic Creole

orthography, which is close to English spelling conventions, lies in the fact that it creates a greater visible distance to English and thus psychologically reduces the stigma of representing merely a "broken English" or "dialect." For any attempt to use Creole as a writing language with a wider range of functions, a standardized version which is furthest removed from English orthography will have greater chances to be taken seriously. The psychological effects can probably best be detected (and tested) in a third, very interesting example where the author, in a text which deals with orality in Jamaican writing, switches in the middle of the chapter from Standard English to Jamaican Creole (Cassidy orthography), citing also a part of The Sistren Theatre Collective's *Lionheart Gal* :

Ex. 3: Carolyn Cooper (1993)

My analysis of the testimonies of the women of Sistren – their verbal acts of introspective self-disclosure – will now proceed in Jamaican. I use the Cassidy orthography which differs markedly from the English-oriented orthography of the *Lionheart Gal* text.

> "We come together and talk our life story and put it in a lickle scene." (p.72) **A so Ava se Sistrin staat aaf: a tel wananada stuori. So yu tel, mi tel, so tel di huol a wi fain out se a di wan stuori wi a tel: Uman stuori. Die siem ting uova an uova. Bot it no iizi fi get op tel piipl yu bizniz ma! It tek plenti haat. So Foxy se iina fi har stuori. She se:**
>
> Plenty women used to talk bout di children dat we have and di baby-faada problem. At first me was shy to talk about myself. Di impression women always give me is dat dem is a set of people who always lap dem tail, tek yuh name spread table cloth. [....] ([Sistren] p.253.)
> (Cassidy orthography in bold print, S.M.)

By placing these different varieties and orthographies next to one another on the same page, Cooper not only "engage[s] in an experimental Jamaican subversion of the authority in English as our exclusive voice of scholarship" (91); she also makes a deliberate choice for her own Creole voice in the option which is more autonomous from the English spelling. As in Devonish's example (Ex. 2), a greater effort is demanded from the reader used to English (which also applies to speakers of Creole) for the sake of a greater and more consistent visible distance to English.[3]

Written in a language which has primarily been used for oral purposes, the Creole text by Devonish seems to address not only the issue of writing in minority languages but also to cross boundaries of register in that it does not and cannot employ established academic jargon in the same way as Standard English. While a detailed text analysis may not be in place in the context of this paper, a few features may be worthwhile pointing out: it is notable that Devonish's Creole text is much shorter than the English translation and he uses fewer words in the Creole text. A greater semantic

3 As reading is very much a process of recognition of familiar patterns this would apply for any new orthography and would resolve itself simply by using this orthography.

transparency (one word=one meaning) offered in the Creole texts seems to counteract the power strategies of academic jargon. Oral strategies like addressing the reader, using the first person pronoun, etc. may additionally serve to "re-personalize" and "re-humanize" the use of language in an academic context. This, however, is very likely to be subject to change (through borrowings, new word formations, etc.) once a language is regularly used for scholarly writing. While the question of *which language* to use in academic writing may be more easily solved by conscious choice, the question of *register* may sooner or later emerge in any language used for this purpose.

These examples of scholarly writing are still in their experimental stages but they should serve to create an awareness of the boundaries which are created by language differences between creative/academic writing and the power relationships which are reflected in these, and – who knows – they may even inspire some further experiments.

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The Position of the Critic in Post-Colonial Studies: 'In the beginning is the relation'

ANNE ZIMMERMANN

People often forget that published texts are transactional.
Gayatri C. Spivak, "Strategy, Identity, Writing" 36

Current debates among theorists and critics in post-colonial studies often reflect an anxiety about the role of the intellectual and about two attitudinal dead-ends that s/he is faced with, which, for the sake of simplicity, I will refer to here as *elitism* and *essentialism*. These two attitudes – or academic positions – were also the object of concerned debate in the Frankfurt workshop for which this paper was originally written, and the present version has profited a great deal from the discussions we had on the possibility and desirability of "reading the subaltern." After characterizing elitism and essentialism from a pragmatic point of view, I propose to briefly outline some theoretical, critical, and institutional practices that might allow us to avoid slipping into roles which contradict the implicit or explicit ideological thrust of post-colonial studies. For strategic purposes, I am generalizing and assuming that post-colonial studies are motivated by a common anti-imperialist interest, hope, or ideology. Needless to say, such a generalization renders invisible the disagreements that have arisen diachronically and synchronically within the field, and it ignores the unavowed interest(s) of academic institutions and individuals when they construct it discursively *as* a field; also, it provisionally overrides important geopolitical differences. My aim in this paper, however, is not to examine where, how, and why elitism and essentialism crop up. Instead, I want to suggest possibilities of dealing with their resurgence in our academic work when they are undesired and disturbing.

Elitism lurks when theorists and critics are led to rely on the prestige of institutional authorization. By contributing to, or reproducing a discourse that is legitimated by a high level of academic currency (and sometimes fashionable abstraction) within an institution traditionally based on the socio-economic values of competition and individualism, academics run the risk of reproducing forms of imperialism that they have actually set out to criticize as inadmissible. One example of the fear of elitism is perceptible in a frequent objection to the very term "post-colonial": the theoretical impetus of post-colonial studies, critics of the term argue, is fundamentally Euro- or US-centric because the prefix "post-" is associated with postmodernism and post-structuralism, and both of these terms have been circulating as the pivotal concepts of powerful and often idiosyncratic master-discourses.[1]

1 The range of misgivings against the term is far greater, of course, and the objections themselves far more detailed and profound; in particular, there is a strong rejection of its confused and confusing reference to historicity. See for example Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-colonialism'," or Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, "What is Post(-) colonialism?" she contends that some of "the most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject" [271]; this statement has to be related to what she holds against Foucault and his followers: the concept of "power," she maintains, now "fills the empty place of the agent with the historical sun of theory, the Subject of Europe" [274]). Many other examples of significant critiques of the term "post-colonial" and its implications could be listed, but it has not been my aim to embark on a critique of the term itself; instead, as I have already mentioned, for strategic purposes I take its current institutionalization provisionally for granted.

Theorists and critics are confronted with the second dead-end, *essentialism*, when they are led to rely on the legitimation conferred to the speaking and/or writing subject by *nativeness*. This legitimation may be afforded either by the *subject's* or by the *object's* biography or skin colour: "my justification to talk about Maori writing," a critic may believe and argue, "comes from my being a Maori;" or, "my justification to talk about subalternity comes from the fact that the author of the text I'm discussing is a Native American and that I take into account her/his minority position." (My use of the concepts of subject and object, here, is intentionally pre-poststructuralist: the critic is the speaking/writing subject of the discourse whose object is the writer or the writer's work. The usefulness and desirability of this dichotomy will be questioned below.) The danger of such an attitude is that the critic or theorist limits her/his position to a form of essentialism that may well backfire, since the concept of nativeness usually refers to an otherness that is easily objectified, exoticized, dehistoricized, and commodified, and therefore plays into the imperialist discourse rather than critiquing it.

My pragmatic definition of the terms elitism and essentialism does not presuppose that they are opposites, since I have not set them up in a dichotomous structure: as attitudes, then, they are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, we need to be aware of the fact that if a theorist or critic holds one of these positions, this does not necessarily exclude his or her taking up the other at the same time. Indeed, when both are combined, we have perhaps the most problematic form of post-colonial theory or criticism: it will be either unwittingly collusive or depend on a comprador attitude. In fact, neither position profits the cause of post-colonial studies as it seems to be defended by Bhabha and Spivak, for example, or by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in the now canonical *Empire Writes Back*. Nor does it profit the more restricted field of professional activity in which I understand myself as working: post-colonial literary criticism.[2] The question is, then, how can the dead-ends of elitism and essentialism be avoided? By more or by less theory? More deconstruction, more wholism, more, or less ideological critique?

To my mind, no method, approach, or theory should be thought of as a guarantee in itself against the danger of neo-imperialism; nor should one believe that a disavowal of theory will allow us to avoid its inherent pitfalls. Indeed, our activity as critics is always necessarily an intervention within one or several socio-cultural processes, since it involves some form of direct or indirect interaction with other people. *This*, rather

2 In my use of this expression, the critical activity and the object of criticism (and teaching) can no longer be defined as entities that are clearly separate and organized in the way suggested by the above distinction between subject and object.

than the appropriateness or the perfect coherence of (a) theory, is what we need to reflect on if we feel concerned by the elitism or the essentialism of our own or someone else's work. In order to do this, we need to understand how and why both literary criticism and theorizing involve a *politics of identity*. Thus, to answer the questions "what role does, respectively should a post-colonial critic take on?" and "what strategies of reading should s/he apply?" we need not so much choose one theory or method rather than another: instead, I would like to argue here, we first have to understand what *identity* is. Also, we must explore what the implications are of the various concepts of identity on which theoretical and critical positions rely. Finally, it would be necessary to investigate which significance the writing and/or reading of literary writing and literary criticism have in specific situations, and to discuss the politics of identity involved by their being written and/or read; in other words, to examine their material production as cultural objects that may take on a variety of values depending on the interactional context. Obviously, this is a vast programme; while I can offer a concrete set of assumptions regarding the concept of identity, I can only briefly touch on the other two tasks.

In the above argument, I have placed the term identity within the context of politics rather than metaphysics. Indeed, an ontological discussion of the term would not be an appropriate response to the question of the *role* of the post-colonial critic. In fact, the inclusion of the terms "subaltern" and "reading" in the title of the 1996 Frankfurt workshop points towards a very specific concern with an ethical and social undertone: that of wanting to reflect on the indirect (and perhaps also direct) effect of our activity on the constituencies *represented* culturally by the literatures that we discuss.

This concern presupposes a complex understanding of representation, the elements of which are inevitably linked: on the one hand we have the notion that reality can be portrayed, mirrored, or described ("re-presented") with the help of the medium of language. On the other we have the idea that "re-presentation" involves interaction and power relationships between people (in the sense of political representation).[3] Therefore, if the representation of the post-colonial is an issue at stake in our critical and theoretical discourse, the concept of identity we need to develop has to take into account not only the *semiotic* aspect of representation, but also the *contingency* of acts of representation, as well as the desire for *agency* implied or expressed through representation. Indeed, the general ideological thrust of (Western) post-colonial studies as it has tended to be expressed at conferences and in research in the past decade relies on the assumption that the constituencies represented by post-colonial literatures instrumentalize literary discourse as a means of *self-representation*, i.e. as a means of gaining control over processes of identification as well as over agency, both of which are usually defined as having been repressed and manipulated

3 Spivak underlines the necessity of dealing with such a double understanding of representation by referring to the possibility of translating the term in German with two different words: *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*. She is in fact implicitly alluding to a complex philosophical and political question that has been a recurring issue in the Western world (see "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 275).

by the colonial masters in order to maintain their political and economic power.[4] Such an instrumentalization is usually accepted as legitimate and necessary, while the critic's act of representing post-colonial literature with the help of (Western) theory is often perceived as a problematic form of appropriation.

Strictly speaking, this is a contradiction, since in the first case, instrumentalization of representation and subject-constitution through discourse is deemed a possible and desirable premise – notwithstanding Spivak's conclusion that the "subaltern cannot speak" ("Subaltern" 308)[5] – whereas in the second it becomes (self-)problematical. Does such a contradiction mean the end of enquiry? Does it cancel the validity of the double statement about representation or make it such an aporetic problem that it cannot be dealt with? My contention is that from a pragmatic point of view, the contradiction does not constitute a foreclosure. Indeed, it is simply due to a shift in perspective and can therefore easily be accounted for: while post-colonial critics usually presuppose and hope that the colonized can speak for herself or himself and therefore actively resist the power of the colonizer through a form of counter-discourse, they feel uncomfortable with the idea that they, as critics, could (want to) become the colonized's proxy; the anxiety is all the more justified if a critic has made a name for her/himself in the academic world and her/his word becomes something of a law. We are therefore not dealing with a methodological contradiction here, but with the logical consequence of an ethical doubt.[6]

Having suggested how I perceive the connection between the concepts of representation and identity within post-colonial studies, I would now like to focus more closely on the latter concept, keeping in mind the three aspects of representation mentioned above – the semiotic nature of representation, and the contingency and agency implied in acts of representation. Post-colonial critics such as Bhabha and Spivak account for these aspects in their writing, but they do not explicitly state how

4 See Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's canonical definition of appropriation and abrogation, for example (*Empire Writes Back* 38f). Here again, my generalization about ideological motivation is questionable but necessary and provisional.

5 Spivak's conclusion needs to be read within the context of her argument directed against academic misconceptions. Her aim is to warn critics of the danger of making "transparent" ("Subaltern" 272, 279, 294, etc.) their position when they presuppose that the subaltern *can* speak and that they can report this speech in its authenticity. Although they have developed powerful critiques of the sovereign subject, Foucault, Deleuze, and others, she contends, "reintroduce the undivided [and sovereign] subject into the discourse of power" by unquestioningly valorizing "the oppressed as subject" (274). In another context, one could speculate that Spivak may have said "yes, the subaltern can speak;" indeed, she concedes that "[r]eporting on, or better still, participating in, antisexist work among women of color or women in class oppression in the First World or the Third World is undeniably on the agenda. We should also welcome all the information retrieval in these silenced areas that is taking place in anthropology, political science, history, and sociology. Yet the assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such work and will, *in the long run*, cohere with the work of imperialist subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization. And the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever" (295; my italics). Therefore, *in the long run* it is advisable to remind ourselves strategically that the subaltern cannot speak.

6 In the interview entitled "Criticism, Feminism, and The Institution," Spivak and Elizabeth Grosz discuss further implications and difficulties of what I briefly characterize here as a contradiction. (See *The Post-colonial Critic* 1-16).

they conceive of identity.[7] This is understandable since they are working within a theoretical framework that is indebted to psycho-analysis and deconstruction, neither of which can accept a stabilization of the term. Indeed, the critique of the sovereign subject and of the tendency, in the West, to conflate the two concepts of subject and individual, amounts to a denial of the possibility and desirability of such a stabilization. However, if we want to address the question of the position of the post-colonial critic pragmatically, I believe it is necessary to explore how one could describe identity from a more functional perspective, even if this means running the risk of theoretical incoherence.[8] I therefore turn to the work done by the social psychologists Weigert, Teitge, and Teitge in *Society and Identity* and offer a systematized set of assumptions about identity and culture that is indebted to their exploration of the concept for sociological psychology:[9]

1) human beings *interact* with one another and can therefore be defined as social creatures;
2) in order for interaction between human beings to function, social groups develop *semiotic systems* which regulate interaction and allow for meaning(s) to emerge and be circulated;
3) as the result of the *need for signification and definition* that arises when human beings interact in a specific historical context, *identity* is constituted as such a semiotic system; it can be achieved as singular identity or group identity;
4) identity is thus always *socially and historically determined*, whether it is the result of an individual's need for self-definition or a group's need for group-definition;
5) though it draws its effectiveness from the *stability* of being a semiotic system, identity is in fact a *process* that integrates social and historical changes;
6) depending on the *kind* of interaction engaged in, and on the form of *power* involved between the persons or groups interacting, the need for identity will be determined either by *psychological, spiritual, social, or political factors*; other factors, such as economic, religious, or ethnic ones can be subsumed under either one or several of the first four mentioned, which may also occur in combination; thus, religious identity, for example, is a combination of a person's interaction with a god (spiritual factor) and with other people who have or seek the same form of interaction with a god (social factor);
7) *culture* is the larger *symbolic framework* within which identity gains a greater potential of meaning either for an individual or for a group;
8) as such culture draws its signifying potential from the *past* (e.g. through a tradition) and from a vision of the *future*; this is its *temporal dimension*;
9) culture also draws signifying potential from *place*, either in terms of an actual or imagined location; this is its *spatial dimension*;
10) *cultural identity* results from the efforts made by a group to organise their lives in a specific time and place according to, or with the help of *a* culture which thus becomes a *distinctive* symbolic system among a variety of others;
11) cultural identity, just like any other form of identity, can be perceived as a *constraining* or a *liberating* structure;
12) therefore, as a symbolic system with a social function, cultural identity *conditions* individuals or groups of individuals, be it chosen or imposed; but it can also *be modified* by them according to the nature and degree of their needs.

In the light of such an understanding of identity and culture, it is possible to conceive of the position of the critic in a more complex way than the simple dichotomy of criticized object and criticizing subject usually suggests. Indeed, in my view identity should be problematized with respect not only to the "object" of criticism but also to the speaking "subject." Also, a perception of the object as possible subject with whom the critic engages in some form of interaction may allow us to avoid the trap of neo-imperialist commodification of the "subaltern," the "post-colonial subject," the "marginal," or the "colonized." As Judith Butler perceptively argues in "Contingent Foundations,"

> this implication of the terms of criticism in the field of power is *not* the advent of a nihilistic relativism incapable of furnishing norms, but, rather, the very precondition of a politically engaged critique. [...] [The critic's] task is to interrogate what the theoretical move that establishes foundations *authorizes*, and what precisely it excludes or forecloses. (6-7)

Thus, the position of the speaking subject must be made visible and its unexpressed involvement in trying to gain control over power has to be examined.

Indeed, the subject in critical discourse is there as an inevitability; because it constitutes itself within the framework of the academic institution, it is often equated with the author who aspires to be the controlling consciousness that produces the text.

7 Spivak does so occasionally, and usually in the negative, for example in "Strategy, Identity, Writing": "one needs to be vigilant against simple notions of identity which overlap neatly with language or location. I'm deeply suspicious of any determinist or positivist definition of identity, and this is echoed in my attitude to writing styles. I don't think one can pretend to imitate adequately that to which one is bound. So, our problem, and our solution, is that we do pretend this imitation when we write, but then must do something about the fact that one knows this imitation is not OK anymore" (38).

8 In several of the interviews collected in *The Post-colonial Critic*, Spivak herself has repeatedly rejected the desire for theoretical purity in feminism, subaltern, or multicultural studies. The call for contingency has been repeatedly made in recent feminist and post-colonial theory; see for example Judith Butler's "Contingent Foundations," to which I refer below.

9 Weigert, Teitge, and Teitge begin their study of the concept of identity with a historical overview of its emergence in the social sciences. They show that it has existed since the 1940s but that it became a central focus of interest in sociology only in the 80s. This should be kept in mind if we are to prevent ourselves from universalizing the concept of identity by dehistoricizing and decontextualizing it.

But could the author not efface her/himself consciously at times in favour of other subjects? Rather than reporting what the other has said or summarizing it in such a way that it strengthens the author's position of authority, extensive quotations could be made that do not have the sole purpose of proving the quoting subject's argument. The other, intruding text should be permitted to stand for itself, perhaps as a voice that is *not* in tune with the author's; to a certain degree, its presence should allow for dissonances of a kind similar to those which occur in conversation or discussions. Making space for these other speaking subjects is not enough, however, as they will never be heard by readers who are not trained to listen to and respect heterogeneity, or who refuse to cooperate by accepting that critical discourse needn't always be a source of institutional power for the individual authorizing consciousness that seems to produce it.

Another practical means of avoiding a neo-colonial attitude in research, teaching, and criticism is to differentiate between audiences that one addresses as a critic or as a teacher, since it is through communication with specific audiences that one's ethics are put to the test. Of course, control over an audience's reaction is impossible; in fact, this may be precisely the boon of speaking and writing to a large and varied audience. A further possibility of avoiding neo-colonialism in criticism is to be prepared to allow for reciprocity both in criticism and in teaching. A relational and dynamic understanding of identity such as the one I have outlined very summarily above will allow for such a possibility, as well as freeing the "real" other from the position of the object. Indeed, if we are concerned about the effect of our own critical discourse on the colonial other as a political constituent rather than as a concept that is a necessary tool in our logocentric self-identification, we need to replace any "speaking about" by a "speaking and listening to" the other. This, of course, requires institutional changes that may remain utopias if we hope for large-scale developments.

In "The Myths That Write Us," Diana Brydon argues for a non-appropriative attitude that the critic can try to achieve in cross-cultural readings: she refers to "Jacques Brault's theory of non-translation by which one aspires to 'ne pas annexer l'autre, devenir son hôte.'... Not to take over but to host: this is the greatest strength of the colonial mind in its approach to otherness, a strength the literary critic would do well to emulate" (10). Of course, this has to be more than a mere rhetorical gesture, and needs to be implemented, for example, not just in choices of curricula but in other institutional decisions, such as the one suggested by Petronella Breinburg during a workshop on "Cultural Mediation" at the 1990 conference of the Association for the Study of the New Literatures in English (GNEL): she urged that Caribbean (and, implicitly, other formerly colonised) linguists and anthropologists be encouraged to observe and describe *European* languages, people, and cultures, since one of the pernicious tendencies of academic activity was to perpetuate colonial structures beyond the era of decolonisation.[10] Indeed, the French phrase "devenir son hôte" need not be translated only as "to host somebody:" it can also mean exactly the opposite, i.e. to become the other's guest, thus including in the single expression *devenir son hôte*

10 See the proceedings of this conference (*Mediating Cultures, Probleme des Kulturtransfers: Perspektiven für Forschung und Lehre*, ed. Norbert Platz) for further meditations on the possibility, conditions, and desirability of cultural exchange and/or mediation.

the possibility of passivity and activity for both host and guest, of an exchange of roles which allows for a true give-and-take in the translational (and cross-cultural?) process.

These propositions about critical attitudes and institutional decisions about research on, and the teaching of, the "other" literatures in English can be compared with Peter Mason's way of dealing with the issue of being involved in talking about the other: instead of thinking about the ontology of self and other, he contends, the critic should consider the relation between the concepts:

> The crucial point is that self and other are relative terms that are themselves produced within the structures of alterity: in that other is always in excess of self, always contains a surplus with respect to self, always imposes the need to redraw the contours of self, the terms are permanently involved in a *process* of definition and redefinition. (*Deconstructing America* 181)

Consequently, his suggestion regarding critical practice is the following:

> we here prefer to start from the working assumption that "in the beginning is the relation," a category of being as readiness to be filled in with a relation between such terms as "I-Thou" or "I-it." That is, it makes little sense to claim that America *is* the Other, but it does make some sense to treat *it as* the absolute Other. The difference is crucial: we replace an ontological statement about the New World with an ethical injunction to approach it with the deference appropriate to the other, not trying to impose our vision on it, but in a state of readiness for what it presents to us that is neither active nor passive (181).

My final suggestion is that we should conceive of the position of the critic in post-colonial studies as "in between," not "above" or, worse, absent or transparent; the role of the critic should be to favour a relational understanding of identity as process. Much as we First World academics would like to, we cannot prevent ourselves completely from appropriating the other discursively. We cannot disown our training and the institution within which we are working, within which we want to find a job, within which we try to transmit the knowledge and values that are important to us, and explore territories from which we hope to retrieve cultural gain of some immaterial kind. There is no definitive route of escape from the dead-ends of elitism and essentialism, both of which may to a certain degree be the inevitable corollaries of intellectual strategies the aim of which need not necessarily be neo-imperialistic. To avoid being trapped in elitism and essentialism, however, perhaps the critic and theorist dealing with post-colonial literatures should be prepared to interact with the "subalterns" without desiring to impose his or her view on them. To conclude on a more theoretical note, I would like to suggest that it may be fruitful to engage with the term subaltern itself as I suspect that Spivak's use of it may be more complex than we assume when we use the term only as a synonym for "a person of inferior rank." In its original, abstract formulation, subalternity, after all, includes both sameness and otherness.

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Which Way to Turn?
Or: What does 'Alignment' with Canadian Native Critical Voices on Canadian Native Literatures Actually Mean?

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> In order to resolve this colonial condition in literature we need to have Canada recognize that first it is our condition, and second, Canada needs to view this condition as unacceptable. In literature this means to move over and create a new space for us in the annals of literature in Canada. It means don't pick up a pen and imagine you need to write on my behalf or that you should. It means that those who lay claim to a place in the dreamspace of creativity must come to understand the difference between honest stretching into the world of imagination and invading on someone else's imagination.
>
> Lee Maracle, "Post-Colonial" 15

What you have just started reading was meant to stimulate a dialogue within a small group of students by raising some of the questions Canadian Native writers and critics have formulated with regard to the activities, attitudes, and functions of non-Native academics and critics. This fragmented piece of writing follows the associative pattern of my inner debate marred and intrigued by my uncertainty, fully cognizant that there is no beginning and no ending to the ongoing process of self-positioning and that there is no single answer to the question of how to react to and meet with the various demands put forward by Canadian Native writers and critics.

Looking at the "Role of the Critic in Postcolonial Studies" I do so from my position as a Canadian/Irish woman of mixed European descent and thoroughly German middle-class upbringing who works on a PhD thesis on contemporary Canadian Native auto-biographies written in English within the German academic tradition and system.

The critical reception of First Nations' literatures from Canada is predominantly influenced by literary criticism on Native American writing as well as by concepts discussed with regard to the literatures in English. Within the US, there is an established tradition of Native criticism as many of the Native authors are at the same time influential critics as well as professors at renowned universities. Here, ideas and terminology of current critical perspectives, e.g. postmodernism and post-colonialism, are accepted as "part of the trade." In Canada, however, a large number of Native writers consciously avoid becoming part of the "establishment," i.e. the academy and the activity of literary criticism. The question of power relations and societal hierarchies is repeatedly raised as there is a basic understanding of white academics following the footsteps of missionaries and ethnographers. To put it bluntly: While the reading of Native texts is to be promoted and teaching them is acceptable, critical evaluation by whites is often perceived by Natives as a neo-colonialist strategy. Nevertheless, concepts discussed among non-Native literary critics in Europe, North America and the former Commonwealth nations have been applied to texts by Canadian Natives. Furthermore, a new generation of university-trained Canadian

Native critics drawing upon sources frequented by many members of academia is beginning to publish their findings in book-length publications as well as in established literary journals.

In search of valid research strategies in reading, teaching and studying indigenous literatures from North America, I consciously look for standards and approaches to these literatures as well as for queries into the possible functions of non-Native critics formulated by aboriginal critics and writers. Re-thinking the categories I was taught and am used to work with in the light of these ideas, I then try to develop through dialogue an informed position of culturally, politically and socially responsible awareness without glossing over differences and gaps in knowledge, understanding and societal orientation, i.e., to develop a form of alignment with the demands formulated by Native writers and critics.

But: What does alignment with Canadian Native critical voices on Canadian Native literatures actually mean when there are at least as many approaches and demands as there are statements by Native critics and authors?

I will try to demonstrate some of my problems in answering this question by focusing on the Canadian Native writer, critic, political activist, orator, Native intellectual, feminist philosopher, mother, educator and community worker Lee Maracle, who is – I would like to phrase it "needless to say" – one of the most published Native authors in Canada. To date, she has written two novels, three biotexts, a collection of short stories, a volume of poetry and a book on sociology and feminism besides her numerous essays, fictocriticism, and political writings.

First of all, the term "postcolonial" – used in the title of this workshop as a cover term for all forms of expression we, as participants in this seminar, are dealing with – is in itself highly questionable. Maracle denies the appropriateness of the term with regard to indigenous literatures in North America. Referring to the status of aboriginal nations as colonized, she argues, the term "post-colonial" renders invisible indigenous peoples' struggle for land ownership and political sovereignty. Applying the term "post-colonial" to Native as well as non-Native texts in Canada, critics neglect basic differences upon which the individual works are created; Maracle accuses post-colonial criticism of dealing with the colonizing and the colonized societies, literatures, and criticisms without differentiation ("Post-Colonial" 15).

This leads us to the political dimension of Native writing in Canada and also to the question of the political dimension of my role as a teacher and critic of Native writing from North America in Germany: What exactly is my "influence" or "power position"?

Maria Campbell – frequently referred to by Native writers in Canada as "the mother of us all" because her autobiography *Halfbreed* published in 1973 became a bestseller, encouraged numerous Native people to write and opened up publishing opportunities for many (Keeshig-Tobias, "Interview" 83) – formulates the function of writing and artistic work for herself as contrary to the notion of *l'art pour l'art*:

> I didn't start writing, making films or working in theatre because of the need to create. I did that because I needed to survive. [...] When I say I don't write to create anything, I really mean that. I wish I had the luxury of just staying home and creating beautiful things. ("Strategies" 7–8)

Art is not perceived as separate from everyday life and activities but as the core of culture as well as part of and means of political action, cultural survival and cultural recovery. As the Gitksan artist and art historian Doreen Jensen puts it: "Our Art is our cultural identity; it's our politics" (20), and

> in my language, there is no word for "Art." This is not because we are devoid of Art, but because Art is so powerfully integrated with all aspects of life, we are replete with it. (17)

Convinced of the power of words and literature (Maracle, "Post-Colonial" 13), most Native authors perceive writing as "an act of resistance, an act of re-empowerment" (Acoosie 33; Freeman 36). Their texts thus fulfil social and political functions (Armstrong, "Foreword" 15) as well as specific personal functions (Charnley 33), for example, as a therapeutic means: "What that book did was give me life. It helped me to go through a healing process, to understand where I was coming from" (Campbell, "Strategies" 7). Consequently, many Native authors claim not to be "authors" or "artists," but rather "community workers" engaged in effecting and sustaining political and social change (Freeman 36; Campbell, "Interview" 41). Thus, it comes as no surprise that a critic's function is perceived to be supportive of the respective social and political causes (LaRocque xix, xxi).

The lack of differentiation between literatures of colonizing and colonized groups under the term "post-colonial," also (mis)leads non-Native critics, according to Maracle, to study Native texts against and evaluate them according to criteria imposed upon Native forms of expression by dominant European-oriented society ("Post-Colonial" 15). While the Anishnabe writer, critic and political activist Lenore Keeshig-Tobias asks: "Should Indian writers and thinkers be good writers and thinkers because they are good writers and thinkers or because they are Indian?" ("Wanted" 4), the Anishnabe writer and academic Kimberly Blaeser points out:

> The insistence on reading Native literature by way of Western literary theory clearly violates its integrity and performs a new act of colonization and conquest. [...] The literature is approached with an already established theory, and the implication is that the worth of the literature is essentially validated by its demonstrated adherence to a respected literary mode, dynamic or style. Although the best scholars in native studies have not applied the theories in this colonizing fashion but have employed them, the implied movement is still that of colonization: authority emanating from the mainstream critical center to the marginalized Native texts. (55–56)

In order to counter appropriative tendencies of criticism, Maracle lists innercultural criteria critics should take into account:

> But those of us who have pondered our memorized stories know we have criteria for story:
>
> - If the speaker achieves oneness with the listener, it's a good story.
> - If the listener is empowered to move to this dreamspace and re-image his/herself, it's a good story.

- If the listener is empowered to move to this dreamspace and re-imagine oneness with humanity, earth, flora and fauna, it's a good story.
- If the story enters the world from the dreamspace where all good stories are born, it's a good story.

> These are my culture's standards – conscious and unconscious – and until they become standards alongside of yours, colonialism in literature will prevail. ("Post-Colonial" 15)

Blaeser also argues for interpretations which use innertextual and intertextual references as guidelines: Native literary works, she argues, create a network which suggests valid approaches to the individual texts (53, 59).

However, as Native authors do not evoke an a-historical, static picture of cultural "authenticity" or "purity," Native literary works may be seen as "hybrid" or "at least bi-cultural" (Blaeser 56). Consequently, "to adequately open up the multicultural texts of Native American literature" (Blaeser 56), its criticism might have to be at least bi-cultural as well. Blaeser's advocacy of Native criteria and approaches thus is to be interpreted as providing what has been lacking:

> If we need a dual vision to adequately appreciate the richness of Indian literature, the Native half to that vision has still been conspicuously absent. (56)

This may well be due to the misunderstanding, misinterpretation or even "invisibility" of verbal products which deviate too far from what a non-Native (in this case: academic) readership expects: "The issue is not that Native peoples were ever wordless but that, in Canada, their words were literally and politically negated" (LaRocque xv). Okanagan elder, writer, activist and educator Jeannette Armstrong and Métis architect Douglas Cardinal's "collaborative discourse" entitled *The Native Creative Process* which presents theoretical ideas on art and creativity in the format of a dialogue between the two Native artists' words, a third's, the Cree photographer, editor and writer Greg Young-Ing's, photographies and its readership may serve as a case in point: This work has not influenced non-Native literary criticism on Native literatures – at least, it is not referred to in arguments, footnotes or bibliographies – probably because it is not perceived to be theoretical.

As the language employed reflects the underlying assumptions of a text, the question of an appropriate language for literary criticism is a vital one. Greg Young-Ing calls attention to the disempowering effect of the scholarly language most often used in literary criticism: "[...] albeit well-intentioned, this body of work tends to reduce the emotionally, historically and culturally-charged issues to dry-information-laden legalise and/or academic jargon" (182). To counter these effects, Blaeser again refers critics to the language used and suggested in the literary works themselves (53, 59). Thus, she argues for a spiraling out of a specific text and its cultural dimensions instead of a penetration, appropriation, colonization or conquest from the outside (53, 56). Maracle argues that language is a site of power politics and accuses literary critics of using jargon in order to exclude Native people from the debate:

> By presenting theory in a language no one can grasp, the speaker (or writer) retains authority over thought. By demanding that all thoughts (theory) be presented in this manner in order to be considered theory (thought), the presenter retains the power to make decisions *on behalf of others*. [...] For Native people, the ridiculousness of European academic notions of theoretical presentation lies in the inherent hierarchy retained by academics, politicians, law makers, and law keepers. Power resides with the theorists so long as they use language no one understands. In order to gain the right to theorize, one must attend their institutions for many years, learn this other language, and unlearn our feeling for the human condition. Bizarre. ("Oratory" 89-90)

To Maracle, de-personalized critical language reflects a process of de-humanization and she asks: "What is the point of presenting the human condition in a language separate from the human experience: passion, emotion, and character?" ("Oratory" 89). Thus, the question of language use leads to the basic assumptions behind scholarly analysis which have been addressed in the so-called "theory/anti-theory" debate – a discussion of the nature of theory, theoretical thought, and theoretical presentation:

> I have become aware that what separates us [i.e., Native and Euroamerican theorists] is not just language; [...] This negation of self and avoidance of responsibility for the self allows Northamericans to speak of things like "development" and mean "stripmining," [...] "women" when they mean white women, [...] "gossip" when they mean feminine sociology, "sociology" when they mean white male studies [...] The very tragic part of this is that they themselves do not see that they don't understand the meaning of the words they use. They use we when they mean no one. (Maracle, "Nobody Home" 116-117)

While often counted among the "anti-theorists," Maracle defines herself as a theorist and explicitly engages in the question of what constitutes theory and its valid forms of representation. However, her definition of the term differs vastly from the concepts proclaimed by European-oriented academia:

> When I say I am a theorist I mean I have come to grips with my self, in solitude and my solidarity with the entire earth in the context of my lineage, past, present and future. I am careful in my consideration of that lineage. I am careful of creation. ("Nobody Home" 116)

Presenting inter-relatedness and personal responsibility as the basis of a theorist's self-image and of theoretical thought, Maracle opposes what she calls "eras[ing] people from theoretical discussion" ("Oratory" 88) and argues for a conscious self-centeredness of theoretical texts as a strategy of meeting the demands of honesty and responsibility: "I am responsible for the theory presented, thus, I place myself at the center of every story" ("Nobody Home" 118). Maracle negates all concepts of de-personalized, scholarly objectivity so common among European-oriented academics. To her, "[c]omplete thought is the mother of theory and theoretical perception" ("Nobody Home" 115), and "[c]omplete thought" is at once "passionate sensual, emotional, analytical, directional, spiritual and lineage connected" ("Nobody Home"

115). Similar to Maracle, the Native writer, storyteller, community activist and educator Joy Asham Fedorick detects linear thinking and the dichotomies and hierarchies it creates as responsible for the social ills most Native writers fight against:

> That racism is a symptom of a kind of thinking, a thinking that allows hierarchy to govern and injustice to prevail. I am committed in my work to address that hierarchy, to destabilize the kind of thinking that it generates. ("Decolonizing" 58)

One strategy employed by Native authors in order to shatter the foundations and frameworks of linear thinking is to write what Fedorick refers to as "participatory" texts ("Fencepost" 29). According to Maracle, this approach is grounded in the tradition of storytelling as storytellers and stories told provide listeners with the insight and tools needed to create meaning:

> I tried very hard to draw the reader into the centre of the story, in just the same way the listener of our oral stories is drawn in. At the same time the reader must remain central to the working out of the drama of life presented. (*Truth* 13)

And Fedorick demands:

> analogies, footnotes, boxes full of examples, quotes, anecdotes are used to reinforce themes and scatter your linear, herded thought patterns into a right-brain intuitive mode. Not scientific you say!! Bah, Humbug!! If one believes the issue of who tells our stories can be addressed through scientific theory, statistical analysis of dependent and independent variables with cost-benefit ratios applied, put this article down right now. ("Fencepost" 29)

Despite the fact that Blaeser is usually counted among the "theorists", her call for an inclusive, non-oppositional language in criticism similarly derives from her understanding of dichotomies as reinforcing "the dominant position of the Euro-American literary aesthetic" (57):

> The emerging critical language expressing this central aesthetic characteristic of Native literature [i.e., ideas of circularity] need not or should not have to base its existence or integrity on an oppositional relationship. (58)

The challenge presented to me is not (only) how to present non-linear concepts in a linear manner and format, but to make room for theoretical tracks of thought which differ from what has been dear to academia – the notion of depersonalized objectivity as scholarly vantage point and pre-requisite of scholarly analysis:

> Some of us de-colonizing Native scholars are challenging existing conventions in research methodology, notions of objectivity, and writing styles. So far, there has been little comprehension on the part of our colleagues. The academic world may be the hardest nut to crack. (LaRocque xxi)

Nevertheless, the political and social realities are still with me. As Young-Ing points out, non-Native critics need to take into account that their voices might be more easily

published and therefore take up space that could be used by indigenous people (182). Thus he demands strategically at least a verbal tribute to the importance of indigenous voices: "[...] these academics do not promote Aboriginal Voice nor do they speak for Aboriginal peoples' unique perspective on the issues" (182). In the context of the (white) women's movement, Maracle argues for "Moving Over" and claims:

> To empower women of color, white women will have to learn to give up some of their privilege, including the privilege of power, and share it with women of color. That is our reality ("Moving Over" 11).

What about the Native/non-Native dialogue which, as Native artists state, is of prime importance in order to develop strategies of alignment (Jensen 19)? While some Native writers and critics include non-Native readers and critics among those capable of developing the de-colonization skills described above,

> as readers, it is our responsibility to join this circle humbly, to listen actively, to accept responsibility, to become more informed, to recognize our complacency, to face our pasts, to remember, to confront the vestiges of imperialist thought which still cling to the edges of our minds, and to create new opportunities for telling and dispelling through our audience. In words, the healing continues. (Damm 113)

While others encourage me to engage in the process, "[a]s listener/reader, you become the trickster, the architect of great social transformation at whatever level you choose" (Maracle, Truth 13), they simultaneously remind me of the trickster's experiences, thus calling attention to traps I may well set for myself, e.g., self-centredness and social, political and gendered ignorance:

> As is sometimes said of the Trickster when he falls victim to his own folly, this creature never learns. (Keeshig-Tobias, "Magic" 175)

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Reading for Transparency? Rereading the Obscure

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The question first came up in a panel discussion with the African American feminist critic and poet Audre Lorde. A woman in the audience (white, German, middle class) got up and said that she fully appreciated what Audre Lorde had revealed about white male oppression and institutional racism in First World countries and about the need to include black women into the picture, but how could she, the speaker herself, possibly teach her students an African novel when so many things referred to in this text were so unfamiliar to her as a European, so difficult to understand and sometimes so obscure that she did not know how to deal with it. What was there to do about this problem, she would really like to know, where could she turn to for help.

This scene (witnessed at a guest lecture in the English department of the FU Berlin, many years ago) rehearses the same routine that Spivak evokes at the outset of her article "How to read a 'culturally different' book." She observes that the demand for a multicultural curriculum has effected, even if painfully slowly, the "inclusion of global English in the college curriculum" – an inclusion, however, that does not simply add variety and local colour to the familiar reading list, but poses crucial problems for the familiar strategies of reading. Its results, she goes on to declare, are often dubious precisely "because neither teacher nor student is usually prepared to take the texts historically and /or politically" (Spivak 126). But what exactly does this mean? How would a historical and/or political understanding of culturally different texts solve the problem of the German reader intending to teach an African book? And what role would the critic play in this scenario?

Here, Audre Lorde's response to the question is interesting. She, in turn, asked the speaker whether she had taught her students Shakespeare and whether she had met with any difficulties trying to make sense of his texts, or whether the works of this "white male author" contained nothing unfamiliar or obscure. Lorde's point in reversing the question need hardly be spelled out. It effectively lies in a critique of "our" concept of "the familiar," delineating a cultural terrain in which, say, Shakespeare is included as "our contemporary" whereas contemporary Third World writing is excluded for being different, difficult and/or obscure to "us." With this critique she seems to suggest that literature by, say, African women would be as accessible and familiar to European readers had we only spent as much critical energy on it as on Shakespeare and had it been credited with as much cultural value. This may be called the canon-argument and its political plausibility may hardly be contested. But still, it hardly solves the problem either. Granted the point that "familiarity" as much as "cultural difference" are political constructs, and given the fact that cultural canons, the teaching machine and affiliative institutions keep a firm ideological grip on us – any attempt at breaking away from these controlling structures must become ever more difficult, if not actually futile. Unless we are prepared to subscribe to the belief in individual self-creation and genuine independence, we must acknowledge the

institutional powers that have shaped our social roles no less than our reading lists. And yet, the political imperative towards a multicultural canon demands that we do not use the past to excuse the future. How then can we move on, critically, politically and practically, towards a multicultural canon?

Spivak leads the way in that she walks "a conscientious teacher through a limpid novel by R.K. Narayan, *The Guide*" (Spivak 126). The choice of this text no less than the choice of metaphor in this statement appear to be highly significant because they offer a central paradigm for the function of the critic in postcolonial (as well as other literary) studies. Spivak's first-person persona here assumes the role of a guide herself who takes strangers/readers through an unfamiliar territory/text using her linguistic, historical, ethnological as well as textual knowledge as assistance for this task, and providing "a feminist reader or teacher in the USA" with precisely the information she might like to have in order to grasp the strategies of representation used in the book (133). The metaphor recurs. Consider Homi Bhabha's final paragraph in "The Commitment to Theory," in which he introduces us to the concept of Third Space and concludes by promising future exploration: "For a willingness to descend into that alien territory – where I have led you – may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture [...]" (Bhabha 38).

These conceptual strategies cast the critic into the role of tour guide and explorer, or, for unenlightened readers, make him/her into something like an emissary of light, clarifying the obscure, rendering the difficult transparent and shedding light on any area of darkness. The Conradian vocabulary is deliberately chosen here. Operating in the name of the enlightenment, such reading practices would indeed seem to rehearse, if not actually reproduce, the functional patterns of travel, rescue and adventure that we are familiar with from the heydays of imperialism. In their effort to track the discursive jungle of a postcolonial text, professional readers posing as critical explorers are in danger of following in the footsteps of Stanley, Speke or Burton.

I may be carrying the point too far, but if my scenario is seen – at least in principle – to bear some affinity with actual reading practices in the university arena, the role of the critic in postcolonial studies would seem to be entirely played out in a colonial frame. The point has not been lost on shrewd observers. It was Sara Suleri who, in her powerful study on *The Rhetoric of English India*, remarked "that the model of nineteenth-century imperialism has never been so well replicated as it has in the relation between writers and critics in the postcolonial academy" (Suleri 154). And it is the international division of labour between Third World suppliers of raw material/texts and the First World academic industry that processes and markets them, which might be taken to bear out her argument. The situation is not principally new, though it has lately become more glaringly obvious as the position of metropolitan criticism/theory vis-à-vis Third World writing has been increasingly questioned. But even in the early years of decolonization when, for instance, anglophone African writing gradually emerged and new voices broke through the barriers of colonial silence, the question of address and audience was never uncontested. Western experts even then rose to the occasion and used their ethnographic information to clarify the dark spots in any African text (mythology, ritual, proverbs: you get it) – for the benefit of Western readers who might otherwise have difficulties in understanding. The issue

is not whether such a practice served a pragmatic purpose, but whether it has inadvertently invested in a discourse of transparency that pervades and prolongs colonial patterns.

Glossing is a case in point. In a postcolonial text situated between conflicting histories and cultures, language is the prime site on which the political cross-currents of deculturation, indigenization and appropriation meet and interact. What is more, in a narrative con/text language is often made to serve a largely referential function, constituting the mimetic relation with the world which the text reconstructs. Therefore, a shared repertoire of meanings, socially perpetuated and linguistically available in the vocabulary, is a crucial prerequisite for fiction. In the anglophone novel from Africa, for instance, a long-time convention (inherited from colonial literature about African settings) makes ample use of English for representing African languages, interspersed with indigenous expressions printed in italics. These, however, seldom occur in isolation, but are either instantaneously translated, explained through contextualisation or glossed in alphabetical order, often added at the end of the book. The cultural implications of such conventions as well as the other linguistic strategies used to convey an African mother tongue through the written medium of a European other tongue, have extensively been studied (cf. Zabus) and need not concern us here. What should concern us in the present context, however, is the simple point that linguistic operations such as glossing, translating or explaining all require a competent bi-cultural operator, that is, a functional mediator situated at the interface of languages and working – not unlike Spivak's guide – in the interests of enlightenment. Who is qualified to occupy this position and what qualifications would he or she need?

There have been times in postcolonial studies when the call for indigenous critics (as opposed to outside experts) was imperative (cf. Chinweizu et al). And, no doubt, we are all the wiser for it and have benefitted greatly from the fact that the academic one-way traffic has, at least in parts, been thoroughly reversed. But if the prevailing tendency is to credit only those people with provisional authority in postcolonial readings who, by virtue of biographical circumstance or personal fate, straddle an intercultural divide – the matter may become just as problematic. Though Spivak never tires to point out her Indian passport, she has also unambiguously stated that an indigenous critic or commentator "is not necessarily helpful. To think the contrary is to fetishise national origin and deny the historical production of the colonial subject" (Spivak 143). This reminder is well-placed and deserves attention: origin and autobiography should not be read as authenticating narratives that would confer authority on critical positions. Just as the colonial subject is historically produced, so is the postcolonial reader. And if, after all, the project of mental decolonization is to proceed in places like the classroom, multicultural literacy must be handled as a matter of teaching and acquisition. But where does this leave our bewildered teacher (white, middle class, German), all willing to include African writing but not knowing how to deal with its obscurity? When anthropology and ethnographic readings are more than dubious helpmates in the project, where else can she/he turn?

It may not be entirely unwarranted at this point to remember Audre Lorde's advice and look for helpful readings in the most familiar places such as in the works of William Shakespeare. This is what I now propose to do – with the following reasoning: If the generally practised role of critic in postcolonial studies is implicated

in, to say the least, a problematic discursive tradition, one way to approach the problem may indeed lie in questioning the aim of textual transparency to which enlightened criticism has subscribed, and in allowing for strategic uses of obscurity when dealing with "culturally different" texts. This approach could indeed start with one of the first constructions of a "subaltern" figure in English literature, the Caribbean son of an African mother, "speaking" in the most elaborate though acquired language, Shakespeare's Caliban. To the extent that this particularly challenging figure from *The Tempest* as well as other figures from the Shakespeare-family have been re-inserted into the political discourses from which they emerged and with which they interact, their supposed "contemporaneity" has yielded to a historical perspective in which they might appear rather less familiar, but in which they invite intertextual readings that nevertheless relate them to topical concerns. Caliban is clearly relevant here. Ever since George Lamming and other Caribbean writers, through creative rewritings and critical re-interpretations, dislodged him from the lofty realm of literary romance and re-established his discursive links with English ventures into the New World, the colonial connections have become ever more prominent and creatively traced by generations of writers. Criticism has followed suit and, with the turn to New Historicism or Cultural Materialism, has directed its attention to the social energies from which the Caliban-figure has emerged and on which it has impressed itself. Most prominently, Caliban's use of language marks his, and our, postcolonial predicament.

Caliban's most famous lines in which he challenges the authority of his English master and teacher (I, ii, 365-367: "You taught me language; and my profit on't/ Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language") shift, or vacillate, uneasily between "language" and "your language," that is, between some universalised concept of human communication and some particularised concept of a specific code, Prospero's (English, or fictional Italian) language. Behind this shift, or vacillation, lies the ideological insecurity of early modern discourses about New World inhabitants with regard to the question whether or not the natives were to be considered human. If humanity were conferred on them, some form of language, different but articulate, could not reasonably be denied: prior to his education and enslavement Caliban then must have spoken in some obscure but human idiom. If, however, New World natives were relegated to the status of brutes and beasts, all their efforts at human communication would be owed to teaching and rely entirely on an acquired tongue. The important point is that only in this latter case Calibanic language – a language totally derived from the master model and completely dependent on its forms – could possibly be transparent to the colonisers, whereas in the former case it would remain obscure.

Shakespeare's text, significantly, offers a double reading for this question, which Stephen Greenblatt in a seminal article of 1976 has followed and contextualised. On the one hand, the play rejects all contemporary stereotypes of the Nobel Savage for Caliban and instead invests into the alternative European fantasy of Wild Man. His language, on the other hand, is the one, but crucial, feature that resists such categorization. Not only does he speak in verse (unlike the European underdogs and drunkards among the shipwrecked party), but he is also given some of the most memorable, if referentially complex, speeches:

I prithee, let me bring you where crabs grow;
And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts;
Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how
To snare the nimble mamoset; I'll bring thee
To clustering filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee
Young scamels from the rock (II, ii, 167-172)

Memorable lines indeed, but what exactly do they mean? Greenblatt writes about them:

> The rich, irreducible concreteness of the verse compels us to acknowledge the independence and integrity of Caliban's construction of reality. We do not sentimentalize this construction – indeed the play insists that we judge it and that we prefer another – but we cannot make it vanish into silence. Caliban's world has what we might call opacity, and the perfect emblem of that opacity is the fact that we do not to this day know the meaning of the word "scamel". (Greenblatt 575)

The lexical difficulty, calling for a gloss that no-one has as yet provided, is symptom of a larger plot in which Caliban is de-familiarised. Even if, in the very lines cited, he volunteers as a guide through the island to take us to its marvels, the semantics of his language remain impenetrable because some of the referents cannot be construed. His reality, even while laying itself open to the European gaze, resists understanding. At the same time, however, it resists silencing. Thus the progress of enlightened criticism trying to make things/ words/ worlds transparent grinds to an unexpected halt.

I would not wish to insinuate a parity of Caliban with postcolonial writers; Shakespeare's subaltern is, after all, constructed on European grounds and placed, as Peter Hulme reminds us, at the intersection of Mediterranean and Atlantic discourses both informed with hegemonic codes (Hulme 108). What I do wish to suggest, however, is a functional equivalence in the positioning of well-read readers. Caliban's concrete and opaque lexis can be read as to effect a textual agency resistant to colonial light and insisting on the failure of penetrating readings. Such an agency can also be encountered in postcolonial texts indexed as obscure or difficult because they first provoke, but ultimately fail to serve, the explanatory and exploratory techniques of informed criticism. In this way they both offer and reject the role of expert guides for critics, and therefore neither gratify nor frustrate the critical desire for exercising knowledge. Thus, the obscure becomes the figure of a subaltern that cannot be read.

Before I will attempt to draw a tentative conclusion from this argument, let me briefly illustrate what is at stake. The following example, though not randomly chosen (it is, in fact, the first postcolonial African text that I myself tried to come to academic terms with), is probably representative of a whole range of texts, not necessarily from Africa alone, which could be cited here. Wole Soyinka's early play, *A Dance of the Forests* has long served as the focal point of a critical debate. Twenty-six years after its first performance in 1960, James Gibbs wrote that it "is unlikely that critics will ever agree about the meaning of this play, about whether it has any meaning" (Gibbs 69) – note the implication that the play's meaning is established through critics' arbitration. But however much opinions may vary, on one point all sides seem to agree: its referential darkness. The judgements range from Dieter Riemenschneider's

sober diagnosis ("eines der ersten und auch der schwierigsten Stücke", Riemenschneider 17), via Gerald Moore's suspicion that the play is "likely to fail dramatically through sheer obscurity" (Moore 36), to Bernth Lindfors' polemical attack when he ranks Soyinka's plays according to their degree of obscurity, with *A Dance* leading the charts:

> The meaning of the action is often hidden behind cleverly veiled allusions and slippery symbols which seem to change shape and significance as the transmogrifytes who inhabit the play move about freely in space and time [...]. Disguise, duplicity, metamorphosis and revelation are recurring motifs in the plotless plot, and as one moves deeper and deeper into the tangled jungle of events one becomes totally lost in their complications and endless ramifications. (Lindfors 200)

The critical language here is revealing: Lindfors narrates his reading experience in the exact terms of Marlowe's journey into the heart of darkness, ironically echoing the actual plot pattern of Soyinka's play and, inadvertently, playing himself the lead in the part of the bewildered critic. Criticism in the wilderness, according to the view presented here, is regarded as an operation to stabilise and retrieve meaning, rending veils, unmasking disguise, preventing changes of significance and doing away with all slipperiness. In short, criticism of this kind aspires to semantic pacification.

This example typifies what I have been trying to characterise and analyse as the problem of enlightened criticism, subscribing to the goal of transparency and therewith substituting the expertise of critics for the agency of postcolonial texts. Agency might be the crucial index of what really is at stake, rather than the question whether or not the subaltern "is listened to" (Spivak 138). I do not think it useful, nor indeed permissible, to assume access to subaltern views or voices as long as "cultural difference" marks the encounter with a text. To read such texts for transparency neglects the essentially relational character of semiotic construction and occludes our own involvement as readers in the pragmatics of meaning. Myths of the enlightenment notwithstanding, there is no such thing as a stable referent to be rescued from within "dark" texts. On the contrary, the obscure is a figure of, and a site for, the laborious task of multiple rereadings from various, different, and diverging cultural perspectives. It is only when I begin with these particularities of my own reading position and bring them to bear on the text that a productive approach to culturally different books can develop. Such an approach would respond to the question posed in the title of this workshop by insisting that "the subaltern" can be, and indeed must be, continually and creatively misread.

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Can 'the Subaltern' Be Read? The Role of the Critic in Postcolonial Studies. An Epilogue to a Workshop

RENATE EIGENBROD

I would like to preface my epilogue with a prologue. At the workshop I was in a different position than the other participants not only because I had heard too late about it in order to contribute to the discussions with a written statement but also because I had come to the topic not so much through an interest in literary theory as through my experience of teaching for many years First Nations literature to a racially mixed class ("the subaltern" included) in Canada. During my participation in the workshop at the University of Frankfurt I got the opportunity to deepen my understanding of non-linear thinking when adding the dimension of space to the concept of time in order to situate myself. At that same weekend of the Frankfurt workshop a Native American Studies conference in Sault-Ste Marie, Michigan, took place to which I had gone often and where I would have been in April 1996 had I not spent a year in Germany. While participating in the discussions at the workshop I had to think of the discussions on the other continent from which had emerged many examples of the so-called postcolonial literature we were wondering how to read. I knew that in the context of the conference "there" the concern about the ancestry of the speaker or presenter of a paper – Native/First Nations or European – would become an issue; however, in the context of the Frankfurt workshop I learned that such an approach means to fetishize the bionarrative (as I had already been told by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her article about "How to read a 'culturally different' book"). I knew that back home in Canada in my teaching of Native literature, I, a middle class woman of German origin, a new immigrant to Canada, would feel the pressure of "aligning" myself not just with the literary scholars "of their own people" but also with the Native students of my class audience. Here in Germany all I had to be concerned about was to make my points in a scholarly manner, or so it seemed; however, the overall topic of the workshop, "The Role of the Critic in Postcolonial Studies," included *responsibility* as a key notion. How, then, could I be responsible in this situation of relating to two audiences? How could I synthesize the "here" and the "there"?

Pondering this dilemma I came to observations, questions and insights during the workshop which I would like to share in this paper written after the workshop, shortly after my return to Canada.

From my position the question that stood out in Session 1 with Sandra Carolan-Brozy's and Marc Colavincenzo's statements was the one worded in the "Call for Statements" for the workshop by Mark Stein and Tobias Döring: "How can these texts [from culturally distant areas] be read and critically evaluated without [...] subjecting them, in neo-Orientalist fashion, to expert Western theories?" Sandra answered this question by suggesting to the European critic to "align" him- or herself with "the

subaltern." In this context "subaltern" meant "Canadian Native Critical Voices" or, to use a term discussed later in the workshop by Mario A. Caro, "organic intellectuals" from a first Nation who act as "intermediaries" between First Nations and immigrant groups. Sandra's suggestion was obviously based on the assumption that First Nations literatures are culture-specific literatures that can best be analysed ("read") by "experts within these cultures," as First Nations (Okanagan) writer Jeannette Armstrong put it in her "Editor's Note" to "a collection of Native academic voices on First Nations literature," titled *Looking at the Words of Our People*, the first and so far only anthology of its kind in Canada. Jeannette Armstrong wants non-Native critics who analyse Native literature "to draw from" those experts; she insists that they "listen to First Nations analysis." But I don't think she means to suggest that one aligns oneself with them in the sense of bringing one's own perspective into the same line of thought, rather that the European academic contributes to a circular organization of scholarly literary work in which equality of all voices is guaranteed. Hence, the "reconstruction of a new order of culturalism and relationship beyond colonial thought and practice" (Armstrong 8) could mean for the European critic an alignment in the other sense of the word: to join as an ally. The political connotation of the term is a reminder of "the politics of interpretation" which qualifies a hermeneutics of cultural difference as "postcolonial"(Said, "Opponents" 1). As allies, critics accustomed to the hegemonic, elitist discourse of institutionalized literary criticism need to "de-hegemonize" critical standards, a term Susanne Mühleisen used in her statement in Session 3 with respect to language standards in literary criticism; they need "to consider that the audience for literacy is not a closed circle of three thousand professional critics but the community of human beings living in a society" (Said, "Opponents" 25).

Making the audience for one's criticism less exclusive requires a redefinition of "criticism" – Sandra pointed to the evolving genre of fictocriticism – and of (the language of) "theory," two implications debated throughout the workshop. But before Western critics, or critics established in Western academia, can even ponder the question if they want to make room in their "closed circle," they have to ask themselves if being all-inclusive wouldn't lead to assuming exclusive rights and hence another form of intellectual imperialism:

> The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. (Said, *Culture* xiii)

In the workshop, Said's point about the danger of blocking "other narratives from forming and emerging" was brought up in Sandra's statement quoting First Nations (mixed blood) poet Greg Young-Ing, manager of one of the two Native-run publishing houses in Canada, that non-Native critics might "take up space" that could be used by Indigenous people. The argument was resolved in our discussion by pointing at the geo-political position of the critic: a person like me, living and working in Canada, would need to share her space, give up some of her privileges, whereas an academic in Germany need not be as concerned. Thinking about this some more I would say now that if one accepts the political stance of the argument that we as non-subaltern, i.e. as "traditional (vs. 'organic') intellectuals," belonging to groups in power (if seen on a global scale), should not be "complicitous in the same exploitative modes of

production we are so privileged as to be able to academically criticize" (Bahri 77), then it is no longer a question of one's country of residence whether one takes away space or not. We all know about and have access to the international network of scholars meeting at international conferences and giving each other space in publications and educational institutions, a network from which the subaltern is largely excluded. From this perspective the question asked in the "Call for Statements": "What is our investment and our interest in a (literary) history that is not unproblematically 'ours'?" should be raised in an ethical sense and should not just "call for practical consideration and involve a theoretical challenge". I agree with Deepika Bahri's point in her article in the journal *Ariel*, "What is Postcolonialism?", which I read after the workshop, where she insists that we cannot "afford ethical blind spots in what certainly was meant [i.e. postcolonialism] to be an enterprise growing from a need for moral accountability" (Bahri 53).

The "need for moral accountability" was prominent in the discussions at the workshop in which the term "responsibility" was repeatedly used, e.g. in Mario A. Caro's statement about the role of "the organic intellectual" which he ended with pointing at a certain kind of "postcolonial practice" that is "a strong warning against a type of scholarship that is irresponsive and irresponsible." Responsible scholarship implies a responsible scholar; it implies a subject that can be made responsible and accountable, hence the necessity to personalize literary criticism, to acknowledge "that it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances" (Said, *Orientalism* 11). Eliminating anonymity in written works of criticism does not only mean to grant agency to a specific subject but also to create an awareness of the audience a critic is writing for. Anne Zimmermann defined the position of the critic in post-colonial studies as relational: "in the beginning is the relation"(and not the word); Edward Said explains that "no one writes simply for oneself [...] There is always an Other; and this Other willy-nilly turns interpretation into a social activity" (Said, "Opponents" 3). If I want my critical writing to be responsible, I should be "in relation to" a specific audience.

After the workshop I came across a definition of "responsible criticism" which corresponded with many of the points made in our discussion: "In order for criticism to be responsible it must always be addressed to someone who can contest it." (Talal Asad, quoted in the Prologue to Krupat, *Ethnocriticism*). Such definition of criticism demands a re-consideration and, may be, a total change of the academic criteria for scholarly literary work. As long as the language of literary theory is used by an elite writing for each other to stay in power (as has been criticised by women writers of colour like Barbara Christian), "the subaltern" will be read in an irresponsible manner. If it is written in relation to and for the people the literature is emerging from (and Mario Caro's differentiation between the "authentic" subaltern and "the organic intellectual" should be well taken here), it may need to be totally restructured.

Throughout the workshop we questioned the use of our language and the necessity of creating categories like "postcolonial" and "subaltern" and debated if such discourse "subtly enacts colonial disempowerment" (Marc Colavincenzo). The term "postcolonial," for example, groups together various colonial peoples, cultures and histories; such non-differentiation, as discussed by Mark Stein in relation to Homi

Bhabha's critical work, may well disempower the respective people as their individual experiences are not "read" on their own terms (e.g. non-differentiation between settlers and Indigenous people). Here literary theory decontextualizes – for the sake of being able to theorize. Also the term "subaltern" (or "minority," or "marginal") is a definition from above, from outside and not from within the respective group. That it is only used as a "concept metaphor," as one workshop participant argued, i.e. a term without a literal referent, merely emphasizes the dehumanizing effect of such language. First Nations (Cree/West Coast) writer and critic Lee Maracle describes "the right to theorize" as a right which requires to "unlearn our feeling for the human condition" (Maracle 13). Listening from my in-between position to our debate about the justification of a certain terminology when it comes to the reading of subaltern texts, I understood why Mohawk writer Beth Brant hesitated to write down and publish stories of abuse and violence that were told to her, why she feared to "betray" the person (and her pain). If such texts are analysed by people who "don't love," as she says, the people who gave the story (Brant 13), there might be indeed a case of "betrayal" because, as another workshop participant put it, the experience is "denigrated by tuning it down to a discursive level." A similar concern, worded more generally as a criticism of our time, was expressed by Uwe Schäfer in his statement about "Critics (lost) in Space" where he suggested to discuss "whether the (re-) establishment of love (as opposed to consumerist desire) and hope (as opposed to messianism) is possible in postmodern times."

In order to attain "institutional validation and certification" (Spivak, "Poststructuralism" 222), critics feel pressured into naming and categorizing. At the workshop we discussed how such moves of generalizing could be dialectically counteracted by moves of specifying. Names "such as Indian, Asian, British, etc. are burdened by their imbrications in the materiality of history," as Schwarz and Ray (162) point out summarizing an argument made by Spivak. To abstract from the specific historical context means to disempower the people who are fighting to free themselves from the burden of colonialism. It is in this context that I want to come back to an argument which I mentioned in my prologue about fetishizing the bionarrative when believing the (subaltern) member of a group more than an outsider. While it is true that "authentic," "truthful" knowledge is not guaranteed by one's ancestry and/or life experience, it is also a valid argument that a people who are in the process of determining their own lives and histories think and feel that they can better represent themselves than be *represented by* "someone else," and that "essentializing" (e.g. certain cultural values) is part of an identity finding process which should not be invalidated by the critic who tries to be *post*colonial. The "denial of subjectivity" is "a luxury not available to cultures still contending for some modicum of expression" (Bahri 69). Instead of silencing *any* voices the critic should try to capture multiple and, most likely, conflicting voices which make up a culture and an individual. Anne Zimmermann argued in Session 3 of the workshop for a critical language that would contain "extensive quotations that are allowed to stand for themselves, perhaps as voices that are not in tune with the speaking subject's and allow for dissonances of a kind similar to those which occur in conversation or discussion." This mode of discourse sets itself apart from the discourse of the conqueror as Todorov explains his own extensive use of quotations in *La Conquête de l'Amerique*. Changing the style of

scientific writing into something that resembles a conversation can be taken one step further. Susanne Mühleisen explored the (boundaries of) language of the critic with examples from the West Indies where critics challenged conventional divisions between "oral/creative Creole and written/scientific standard English" and have written papers in the indigenous vernacular.The workshop ended on a cautionary note. The last word of the last statement by Tobias Döring was "misread." In my opinion, to acknowledge that not everything can be explained or made "transparent" and that mistakes will undoubtedly be made (although in the arena of postcolonial studies they might be considered "dangerous") was a good way to end the discussions. When the settlers came to North America, they needed help in the wilderness from the people to whom this was no wilderness; in the area of literary studies the critic coming from the outside will also need help from the people inside a certain way of constructing texts. It may be "dangerous" to use images like "darkness," "impenetrability," and "obscurity" in order to indicate the challenge these texts provide as such images could be easily read as stereotyping the mysterious Native who cannot be understood by means of rational thinking; however, they also communicate the message that the reasoning of Western civilization has its limitations so that the critic in postcolonial studies should understand him- or herself more as a receiver than as a provider of knowledge. I left the thought-provoking discussions of the workshop with the feeling of an ambivalence I find most pointedly expressed in Gayatri Spivak's essay "Theory in the Margin:" "even as we join in the struggle to establish the institutional study of marginality we must still go on saying 'And yet ...'" (154).

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